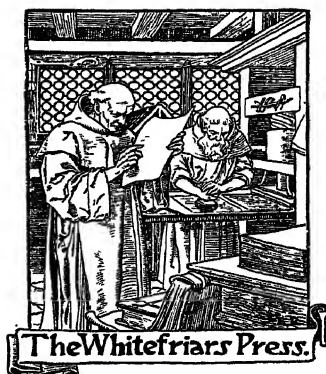


Mr. Facey Romford's Hounds



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MR. FACEY

ROMFORD'S

HOUNDS

Illustrated

With 24 Hand-Coloured Engravings by

JOHN LEECH

and

HABLOT K. BROWNE

Text Illustrations by W. T. MAUD

VOLUME II

London

Bradbury, Agnew, & Co. Ltd., Bouverie Street

Mr
RONEFORD'S
HOUNDS

By the author of
"Handley Crofts,"
"Mr Sponges Sporting Tour,"
W.C.B.C.
with illustrations
by John Leach



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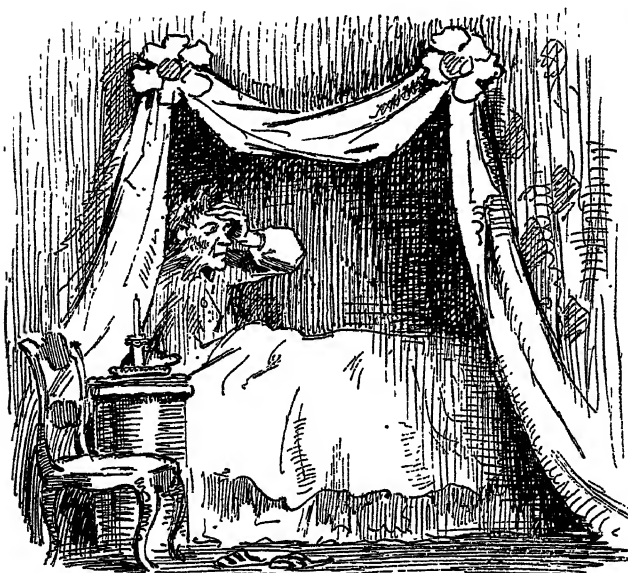
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CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE HUNT BREAKFAST.



"A Winey Headache."

R. ROMFORD
awoke at day-
break next
morning with
a parched
mouth and a
somewhat
winey head-
ache; not at
all himself, in
fact. The
late dinner
and multi-
plicity of
dishes had
disagreed
with a gen-
tleman ac-
customed to
early hours

and simple fare. He had never tried such a mixture before;
"meat, puddin', and cheese" (all the delicacies of the season,
as the sailor said), being the utmost extent of his wants.

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But that he had been gradually inducted into magnificence through the instrumentality of Beldon Hall, he would now scarcely have known himself, stretched in a great canopy-topped state bed in a noble room, with brilliant chimney-glass, splendid cheval one, tapestry carpet, and every imaginable luxury. What did a man want with so many baths, who always took a header when he was heated!

Of course the capital Louis Quinze clock on the marble mantel-piece did not go, so Facey appealed to his own great silver watch under the pillow to know what o'clock it was, and finding it wanted several hours to breakfast, he did not see any reason why, because the bed was a fine one, he should lie in it longer than he liked; so he bounded out, and making for a window, proceeded to reconnoitre the landscape.

"Aye," said he to himself, after an identifying stare, "that is Wavertree in the distance, the village with the spire is Dronefield, and the white house beyond will be Mr. Bullinger's, of Prestonworth."

So he settled the matter satisfactorily in his own mind, and then moved the previous question,—namely, that he should dress. But where were his clothes? They had taken them away to brush, or perhaps mop up the beer-slops with in the servants' hall, and then fold and return, and there was nothing for him but the choice between his hunting things and dress ones. Neither of those would do, so he must try to recover the Tweeds. But they had put the bell where nobody could find it; and Facey had to cast about as he would for the scent of a fox. When he did find it, nobody would answer it; for the girl in charge of the numbers merely announced "Number one bell" in the hall, and every servant who heard her concluded that the occupant of such a magnificent apartment—the best room—would be sure to have a valet to answer it, and thought no more of the matter. And when Facey, having taken another rather fretful survey of the landscape, returned again to the charge, an exclamation of "Number one bell!" was all that the ring produced; and so on for a third.

"Rot the fellow!" exclaimed Facey, swinging round with

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vexation; and after taking a turn about the spacious apartment, he at length settled before his hunting clothes. "S'pose I must put them on," said he, taking up the Bedford cords, and proceeding to jump into his other clothes in the promiscuous sort of way of a man going to bathe. He then opened his door, and emerged from his room in search of adventures. The landings and staircase were only half awake; and when he got downstairs he found everything in the uncomfortable state familiar only to early, too early, risers. One housemaid on her knees pipeclaying the passage, another raising a cloud of dust with her broom; rugs, mats, pails, dusters, all higgledy-piggledy—everything in the height of confusion. The fine overnight footmen were hurrying about in caps and all sorts of queer clothes, bearing trays full of plate, linen, and china,—the ingredients of another great spread. Worming his way cautiously among the obstacles, Facey at length reached the front door, and emancipating himself from the house, was presently in the fresh air. Very fresh and pleasant it was, and most grateful it felt to his fevered frame.

"Oh, Francis Romford, my beloved friend," said he, "you had too much wine last night. Oh, Francis Romford, this dinin' out doesn't suit you. Oh, Francis Romford, it's a great luxury to have just what you want to eat and drink, and no more. Oh, Francis Romford, it's bad to hunt with a sore head. Huntin' and drinkin' are two men's work."

Then he thought a pipe would do him good; and a pipe he accordingly proceeded to take, sauntering along the fine Kensington gravelled drive as he made the necessary preparation for a smoke. This brought him within sight of the stables,—a well-built, rough-cast range, with coach-houses in the centre.

"Humph! not bad-like quarters," said Facey, eyeing them. "Have seen good horses come out of much worse stables than those." And thereupon he determined to inspect them. Making for the range on the right, he found himself among the greys in the coachman's stable, with the great Mr. Spanker sauntering about, superintending the stablemen in the "you-do-your-work" sort of air of a man who does nothing himself. Pugs, cobs, and

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coachmen were things Mr. Romford eschewed. Pugs he looked upon as eyesores; cobs he never knew the use of; and coachmen, he thought, were men who would be grooms, only they were too lazy. A very slight inspection of the greys, therefore, satisfied him; and returning Mr. Spanker's salute with an air of indifference, he turned on his heel, and sought the other side of the stable. Spanker, however, recognised him, and said to his helper, "That is the varry gent as came up through the grating arter the rats when we was at Beldon 'All."

When, however, Facey got into the hunting stable, he found himself at home; and Gullpicker, the presiding genius (a Melton man, whom nobody would have at Melton), seemed impressed with the importance of his visitor. He raised his cap most deferentially, and Facey having returned a nod, and a voluminous puff of smoke, then proceeded to criticise the horses.

There were four well-shaped, well-conditioned bays, well clothed, well littered, well done by in every respect except well ridden. In this latter indulgence they were sadly deficient, indeed, the two that the man who hunted for conformity was going to ride that day, had been out, getting the fiery edge taken off them with a gallop on the green. There were now a couple of straps at work upon either side of them, each hissing and thumping as if they would stave in the horses' ribs. Willy was all for having everything as it should be, and Gullpicker was the man to accommodate him. It took two men to strap a horse properly, Gull said, so two to a horse Gull had. It is strange how some fellows get places by merely trading on a name. If Gullpicker had come from Manchester, Musselburgh, or any other place beginning with an "M," Willy would never have thought of him; but coming from Melton, he concluded he must be all right, and so gave him eighty pounds a year and his house. A livery-stable keeper would have given him twelve shillings a week, and would most likely have turned him off at the end of the first one.

Romford now stuck out his great legs, and proceeded to question the worthy, and very soon wormed out the secret of the stable,—which was a hard 'oss, which was a soft 'un, which

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was a show 'un. The show 'un was master's special favorite, the man said, whom he described as a very shy rider; indeed, the groom thought if it wasn't for the sake of wearing the red coat, Mr. Watkins would never go out hunting at all. And Facey said, that was the case with a good many men he knew, adding, that it would be a good thing not to let any man ride in scarlet until he had ridden three years in black.

The servants' breakfast bell now rang a noisy peal, for the Watkinses considered it incumbent upon them to let all the neighbourhood know when there was any eating going on; and Facey having mastered his subject, jerked his head at the groom, who renewed his deferential salute as our master rolled out of the stable. A master of hounds is always a hero in a groom's eyes.

When he returned to the house, it had got into more comfortable order. The scrapers and door mats were restored to their proper places, the mops and pails had disappeared, and a partially revised footman was brushing and arranging the hats in the hall. To him Facey communicated his lavatorial wants, and was forthwith reconducted upstairs and introduced to the dressing-room of his apartment, where he found such an array of baths, foot, hip, shower, as to a man who always took a header seemed quite incomprehensible. Discarding all these, he requested the footman to get him some hot water, wherewith and by the aid of a razor and soap, he proceeded to divest himself of the superfluous portion of his cane-coloured beard, and then treated his pretty face to a wash in the fine mazarine blue and white china basin, thinking all the while what old Gilroy would say if he saw him.

Very queer his old fourpenny shaving brush, and twopenny soap-box,—to say nothing of his horn comb and shabby hair-brush,—looked on the fine lace-pattern toilet-cover, lined with blue silk, and edged with Honiton lace. Very different was the toilet glass, with its carved frame and spiral supporters, compared to the few square inches of thing in which he used to contemplate his too fascinating face at the "Dog and Partridge," or the "West-end Swell." And Facey wandered backwards and

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forwards between the bed and dressing-room, surveying his irresistible person first in one mirror and then another, thinking what a killing-looking cock he was.

The noisy gong presently interrupted the inspection, and looking at his watch he found it only wanted twenty minutes to ten, and at half-past the hounds would be due before the door. Tearing himself away then from the mirror, he opened the door and proceeded downstairs, encountering his lisping friend full in the face at the junction of the flights.

"Good morning, Mither Romford," said she, extending her pretty white hand as she spoke.

"Good mornin', Miss," replied Facey, taking and squeezing it, adding, "I declare you look quite bewitchin' in this fine new thingumbob," taking hold of it as he spoke.

Miss smiled, and showed her pretty pearly teeth, fresh from the application of the dentifrice; and while Facey was busy staring and turning a compliment, Mrs. Dust's unlucky maid opened the green-baized door communicating with the back stairs, and spoilt the production. Miss then gave a whisk of her crinoline, and the two concluded the descent of the staircase together. On entering the dining-room, they found the heads of the house busily engaged superintending the final arrangements of the table,—marshalling the plate, adjusting the flower vases, pointing out the position for the egg stands, and the places for the toast, the twists, the tea cakes—the light artillery generally.

"Good morning, my dear Mr. Romford," exclaimed Mrs. Watkins, advancing gaily and tendering her hand to our master, quite pleased to see him and her smiling daughter arriving so amicably together.

"Good morning, Romford: how are you?" exclaimed Willy, now seizing Facey's hand in the hail-fellow-well-met of a brother fox-hunter; adding, "here's a fine day—hope there'll be a good scent."

"Oh, yes, and a good fox, too," rejoined Mrs. Watkins.

"Hope so," said Facey; adding, "I'll give a good account of him if there is."

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"Do," exclaimed Willy; "in 'Bell's Life' and the 'Field.'"

"Hut! you and 'Bell's Life,'" growled Facey in disgust.

The large richly-chased silver Queen's-patterned teakettle now came hissing into the room, with its corresponding teapot, sugar-basin, and cream ewers, and simultaneously an antique melon-patterned coffeepot, with similar accompaniments, alighted at the low end of the table. Honey, jellies, jams, then took up positions at regular intervals in support of the silver cow-mounted butter-boats, and next long lines of cakes, muffins, buns, rolls, toasts, filled up the interstices.

A Westphalia ham, a Melton pie, and a *pâté de foie gras* mounted the plate-garnished sideboard, just as Mrs. Somerville came sailing in, and the first ring was heard at the front door bell.

Mrs. Watkins, having greeted Mrs. Somerville warmly, hoping she had slept well and not been disturbed by the wind, then backed her into her overnight seat by her husband, and, sailing up the room, installed herself in her own chair, with Facey on her right again and Cassandra next to him, just as Burlinson brought up the first comers, in the persons of young Brogdale, Mr. Tuckwell, and Mr. Horsington, who, after smirking and smiling, subsided into seats and began eating as if they had not tasted food for a week. Some people never miss a show meet.

Ring—ring—ring—ring; ring—ring—ring—ring—ring; ring—ring—ring—ring—ring—ring then went the bell, each particular man seeming to think it necessary to ring for himself, though the door was yet open for his predecessor. Then whips of all sorts clustered together, and pyramids of hats and caps rose in the passage; and the cry was still "They come—they come!" Gayslap, and Rumball, and Botherton, and Brown, and West, and young Felt, and old Muggleswick, and we don't know who else besides.

Great was the variety of hunting costume, great the run on the cups and saucers to supply the behests of the wearers. "Cream, if you please." "Have you got any sugar?" "May I trouble you for the salt?" Then arose a surge of mastication that was quite opposed to the idea of the parties having break-

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fasted before. It was very much a repetition of the Pippin Priory performance, only the appointments were finer and grander. Mrs. Watkins had no idea of being outdone: only let her know what the Larges had, and she would soon get something better. If they had had a boar's head, Mrs. Watkins would have had a bull's or a buffalo's.

Facey, though not quite happy, was yet far more comfortable than he had been overnight, or when he run the gauntlet of inquisitive eyes as he made his way up the breakfast-room at Pippin Priory. Here he sat somewhat like a gentleman taking his ease in a penny chair in Hyde Park, having the population paraded before him, and if the servants would only have let him alone, he would have done pretty well; but either the butler persecuted him with buns, or the footman teased him with toast, or Miss lisped something that he couldn't understand, and was obliged to ask her to say over again, so that the act of deglutition proceeded slowly and irregularly. He was accustomed to swallow his breakfast like a foxhound. All he wanted was to get it down, and then pocket a crust for future want, and be off.

Meanwhile more gentlemen came stamping and clanking in from all quarters, in red coats, and green coats, and black coats; in white boots, and brown boots, and black boots, all apparently ravenous and settling to the viands as soon as, having bobbed to the ladies, they could get seated at the table. Some stuck to the sideboard, trying the *noyau*, the *crème de Vanille*, the *parfait amour*, the cherry brandy, and so on. The Watkinses didn't give champagne, they were told it wasn't fashionable. Sip, sup, slop, clatter, patter, clatter, patter, was the order of the day. More tea, more toast, more coffee, eggs, muffins, and butter. Many people will give away any amount in victuals, from whom you could not get a penny in cash if it was ever so.

At length there was a lull; some stuck out their legs, others began exploring their mouths with their toothpicks, some again arose and began looking about the room at the various family pictures, Mrs. Watkins in a green satin dress, Miss in a yellow

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silk one, Willy in a hunt coat, Willy in a dress coat, Willy in a shooting coat. Then there was a move to the window. The hounds had just come, attended by the usual cavalcade, and Facey rushed to see what sort of equilibrium the servants presented. All seemed right.

There was Daniel—the Right Honourable the Hurl of Scamperdale's Daniel—sitting erect on that uncomfortable-actioned horse Oliver Twist; there was Chowey—insinuating Chowey—relaxing and contracting his extraordinary proboscis as if he was going to kiss all creation; and there was the strong persevering man who cleaned horses, riding that noble long-tailed brown horse Bounding Ben, whose only fault was that he could not be relied upon for bounding. Altogether a most respectable looking party, and greatly indebted to Tick. Then as Miss was lisping her admiration of the establishment to Mr. Romford, the hum of conversation was interrupted by her mamma rushing wildly up the room exclaiming,—

“ Oh, Mr. Romford! oh, Mr. Watkins! oh, Mr. Romford! I *am* so shocked—I *am* so distressed—I hardly know what to do. I wrote to that tiresome Mr. Castangs to send us a fox—a Quornite, if he could—and there's none come!—and there's none come! Was there ever anything so provoking!—was there ever anything so provoking! Oh, what *shall* we do, Mr. Watkins?—what *shall* we do, Mr. Romford?” continued Mrs. Watkins, appealing imploringly first to one and then to the other.

Willy, of course, didn't know what to do, and Facey was too disgusted to answer the question; in addition to which, a giggle of laughter ran through the room, showing the position was appreciated. So, looking at his watch, and seeing it was a few minutes past time, he gladly tendered his adieux, hurrying out of the room, exclaiming to Mrs. Somerville as he got to the door, “ I say, Lucy, mind, pork chops and smashed potatoes for dinner at five!” He then swung gaily into the hall, got his hat, and made straight for his horse in the crowd. The Right Honourable the Hurl of Scamperdale's Daniel then saluted him with an aërial sweep of his cap, and Chowey, relaxing his proboscis, followed suit.

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Mr. Castangs having disappointed our friends, there was no occasion for Mr. Romford to indulge in the usual make-believe draw round Dalberry Lees; so, getting on Pilot, he trotted quietly over Amberwicke Meadows, and, running the hounds through Walton Wood, passed on to Westdale Park.

But though the portly owner, Mr. Banknewton, was an ardent supporter of the hunt, and always made a show of insisting upon his keeper having foxes, yet, not having notice, and of course relying on Mrs. Watkins supplying the wants of the day, his fox was not ready any more than the other. So Mr. Romford passed on from hall to house, and from hill to vale, until he got entirely out of his stop; without, however, having exactly a blank day, for Chowey whipped a very fine fox off a hedge-row on Mr. Mitford's farm at Ripple Mill, which immediately went to ground in a well-accustomed breeding earth behind the house.

It is, however, but justice to Mr. Castangs to state that he had not been indifferent to his good patron Mrs. Watkins's interests; for, when Independent Jimmy came with the melon frame to take Mrs. Somerville back to Beldon Hall, the fox was seen sitting in his airy trellis-work box beside Jimmy on the driving seat. It had been carried past by the thoughtless guard of the 9 a.m. railway train. Better, however, that he should carry the fox past than the pea-soup. Mrs. Watkins, however, determining not to profit by the occurrence, begged Mrs. Somerville to take the fox back with her to Beldon Hall; which our fair friend consenting to do, and all things being at length ready, after a good deal of kissing and hugging, the ladies got parted; and Lucy and Dirty, being duly ensconced in their vehicle, drove away, leaving the late lively Dalberry Lees to relapse into its accustomed quiet. Dirty, we may add, had made rather a somewhat profitable visit of it, having picked a pearl and ruby ring off Mr. Watkins's dressing-table, a gold thimble out of Miss Watkins's work-box, and extracted seven-and-sixpence from a drawer in the house-keeper's room, which none but herself would ever have suspected of holding a halfpenny.

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CHAPTER XXXV.

THE BAG FOX



WHEN Mr. Facey Romford returned to Beldon Hall after his visit to Dalberry Lees, he found what ought to have converted the nearly blank day there into a splendid triumph; namely, the unfortunate bag fox, now located in his own entrance hall. Facey got a whiff of what Mr. Watkins would call his "aroma," almost as soon as he opened the front door; but never dreaming of such a thing as a fox being in the house, he just chucked his hat and whip at random in the dusk on to the accustomed table near the screen behind which he kept his rake, and was making onwards, thinking of his pork chops and smashed potatoes, when a scratching noise arrested his attention on the other side of the spacious entrance. Facey stopped, and in the evening gloom the apparition of a new trellis-work cage stood in bold relief against the carved back of an old oak chair.

"Do believe it's a fox," muttered Romford. "Can be nothing but a fox," added he, making up to it, and looking in, as the unmistakable scent greeted his nose. "It is a fox!" exclaimed he, wondering how it came there. He then called for a candle. Dirtiest of the Dirty presently came tripping along, with a thick-wicked tallow, in a block-tin candlestick, in her hand; and Romford, flourishing it over the cage, caught sight of the parchment label, and read: "WILLIAM WATKINS, ESQ., DALBERRY LEES. *By Rail, to be left at the Firfield Station. Keep this side up.*"

"Oh, the deuce!" muttered he. "Why, this is the gentleman

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that ought to have come in the morning." Then a further inspection of the address revealed his own name: "FRANCIS ROMFORD, ESQ., BELDON HALL. *With Mrs. Watkins's kind regards,*" in the most elegant hand, added at the bottom.

"Humph!" muttered he, "this is a pretty present for a master of hounds to receive. S'pose they'll be sendin' me a colley dog or a pipin' bullfinch next. May mean it for kindness; s'pose they do," continued he, thinking of the white shoulders; "but in reality it's anything else. Never hunted a bag fox in my life," said he, scratching his head. "Should be 'shamed to hunt a bag fox. What would life be without foxes?" continued Facey, now lowering the candle, and looking into the cage to examine his present more minutely. Reynard, half timid, half savage, made for a corner, disclosing, however, enough of his proportions to let Facey see he was a fine one,—rather light-coloured along the back, with a full brush and a grizzleyish head. "Wonder what sort of a mouth he's got?" continued Facey, making for the table, whereon lay his hunting whip, and returning to stir the fox up with it. "Snap!" He seized the stick with an energy that made Facey thankful it wasn't his thumb, disclosing, as he snapped, a set of slightly failing but still very serviceable-looking teeth. "Good fox, very," said Facey, wondering where he came from. "Highlands, of course," added he, shrugging up his high shoulders, well knowing he did nothing of the sort. "Well," mused he, "this is the way to bring fox-hunting to an end. Steal each other's foxes, and then we shall have nothin' to hunt. Bad work, very," muttered he, "when it comes to this." And if it hadn't been for the fair daughter, Facey would have abused Watkins right well. As it was, he let off his steam by abusing the sham-fox system generally, declaring he would rather hunt with a pack of rabbit-beagles on foot, than condescend to such work. "A rat in a barn, with a terrier, is worth two of it," said he.

And he was half inclined to open the box and liberate the fox at the door; and nothing but the fear of his being

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ignominiously nipped up by some passing cur prevented his doing so. Facey, therefore, adjourned the consideration of the question what to do with him until after the discussion of the sumptuous fare he had ordered in the morning. So he now proceeded to his bedroom to divest himself of his hunting attire, and assume the easier clothes of the evening. Then, old Dirty having the repast ready at the appointed time, Dirtiest of the Dirty resumed her waiting avocation; while, between chops and cheese, Lucy enlightened Mr. Romford as to the misfortunes of the bag fox, and Mrs. Watkins's anxiety for the notification of the disappointment. Lucy had told Mrs. Watkins that she did not think her brother would have anything to do with a bagman; but Mrs. Watkins was positive the other way, asserting that a fox was a fox; adding, that surely it was much better to have one in a box ready for use, than to be at the trouble of searching and prowling about in a wood, without, perhaps, finding one after all.

"Oh, do take him," pressed Mrs. Watkins; "Mr. Watkins will be so disappointed if you don't; and I'm sure we have no use for him here," added she. So Mrs. Somerville reluctantly consented, and Independent Jimmy had the pleasure of the fox's company as he drove back to Beldon Hall.

There the reader has already seen him; and the question now is, what to do with him; for though the whiff of a fox is very pleasant and exhilarating in the open air—especially in the hunting season—yet we do not know that it is quite so agreeable in the house. So, too, thought friend Facey; and the point now was, how to get rid of him without offending Mrs. Watkins. At last he thought he had it.

"I say, old gal, let you and oi get up early in the mornin' and give that bagman a dustin' with a few couple of hounds," said Facey to Lucy between the puffs of his after-dinner pipe.

"Well," said Lucy, "I'm quite agreeable."

"It's a non-hunting day," continued Mr. Romford, "and it will keep the horses' backs down and the men quiet by letting them see we can do without them. "You ride Leotard," said he, "and I'll have that invincible Baker, and see if a gag

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will prevent his pulling my arms out of their sockets, as he generally does."

Lucy was quite agreeable to that also; Mr. Romford then sunk into the roomy recesses of his well-stuffed easy chair, and luxuriated in his pipe as he passed his fine gratis pack of hounds in review before him. He was a man of decision, and quickly made up his mind what to take and what to leave at home. Ten couple was just what he would take, and ten couple he had to the fore in no time. So, having finished his pipe, he arose from his chair, and, chucking a log of wood on to the fire to last till he came back, he got a candle and went and had another stare at the fox. Here he was presently joined by old Dirty, Mrs. Mustard herself, who, in reply to his inquiries where he could get a mouse or a few beetles, replied that she had a couple of mice in the trap just then, and, as to beetles, why her back kitchen fairly swarmed with them; so sending her away for the mice and a handful of beetles, as also for a saucer of clean water, Mr. Romford presently made his poor prisoner as comfortable as a fox could be made under the circumstances, and left him to enjoy himself as best he could.

He then proceeded to the stables, where he found Swig and Chowey in the saddle-room deeply engaged in a game of dominoes, Chowey having rather the best of it up to the time of Mr. Romford's coming. Here, too, was Short, the stud-groom as he was now called, having some coatless, characterless helpers under him. Mr. Romford, having first ordered Leotard for Mrs. Somerville, and the Baker for his own riding out of the brilliant galaxy of stubbornness and vice with which his stable was supplied, and Chowey, having put the finishing stroke to the game, Mr. Swig was at liberty to talk to our master, who forthwith ran him through a list of ten couple of hounds that he wanted in the morning so rapidly that if Swig had not had his two intelligent friends in the saddle-room to assist him, he would infallibly have made some mistake.

"Eight to a minute!" then cried Mr. Romford, giving a general order for all—"eight to a minute!" repeated he, rolling out of the room, leaving his audience very much surprised at his

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proceedings. But Lucy and he were always dropping in upon them at unqualified hours.

"What's up now!" ejaculated Short, who had calculated upon having to act figure footman on the morrow.

"Must be going to have a hunt by themselves," suggested Swig.

"The same as they had with the Heavysides," observed Chowey, pursing up his peculiar mouth as he recollected Swig's and his own misfortune in the gig—or, rather, out of the gig.

"Shouldn't wonder," assented the strong persevering man.

"Gallant little 'oman to ride," observed Swig; adding, "I *do* like to see her go."

"He's a rum 'un," muttered Chowey. "Of all the rum 'uns I ever lived with, he's the rummiest."

So they proceeded to discuss the merits and peculiarities of our worthy master, without disparagement, however, to his sporting prowess, which indeed nobody could deny.

Meanwhile Mr. Romford, little caring what they either thought or said, hurried off by the light of the moon to the great Mr. Proudlock's, to whom, having presented a bottle of Lord Lovetin's best Jamaica rum that he had wrapped up in an old "Bell's Life" newspaper in his baggy coat pocket, he propounded his intentions for the morrow. Mr. Proudlock, thus properly propitiated, would be most happy to do anything in his power to serve Mr. Romford, and, after discussing various localities, the Holly Meadows, Eddys Row, Limecoats Green, Shortleet Moor, High Thorn Wood, and other places, it was at length decided that Mr. Proudlock should start away betimes and enlarge the fox in High Thorn Wood, on the east or Hard and Sharp side of the country, where they would be less likely to disturb any of the tenacious game preservers' covers on any of the country that Mr. Romford would be likely soon to draw himself.

And Mr. Romford, having thus made all preparations for the coming day, left Mr. Proudlock to discuss his rum, while he returned to his comfortable quarters at the Hall, thinking how

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much snugger it was to roll about in Tweeds and be waited upon by a Dirty than to have to undergo the penance and persecution of a party—the persecution of wine, the persecution of fish, the persecution of food in general, the persecution of footmen, the persecution of finery. Oh, those horrid hoops! What wouldn't he give to destroy them—smash them irrevocably!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BAG-FOX ENLARGED.



R. ROMFORD awoke quite cool and comfortable the next morning. All traces of wineing squeamishness were gone, and he was the real original Dog and Partridge Romford, ready for hunting, ready for shooting, ready for riding, ready for anything. "Humph! what's to-day?" exclaimed he, starting up in bed, as he awoke—"what's to-day?" fearing lest he might have overslept himself and be late to cover. "Ah," continued he, recollecting himself, "it's not a hunting-day—it's a bye with the bagman. Well, needs must when a certain old gentleman drives," continued he. So saying he bounded out of bed with a thump that would have shaken a modern-built house to the centre. He then proceeded to take his accustomed stare out of the window. It was a fine morning, still and quiet, with a slight white rind on the ground that the now rising sun would quickly dispel. "Pity but it was a reg'lar huntin'-day," muttered he, surveying the scene; "think oi could give a good wild beggar a dustin'." He then proceeded to dress himself. As he descended the grand staircase, and cut off the corner of the hall on his way to the breakfast-room, he got a whiff of his overnight friend, though Dirtiest of the Dirty, whom he met dribbling along with the kettle, assured him that Mr. Proudlock had taken him away a full hour before. The fact was, the old Jamaica rum had been too potent for friend Proudlock, who, having gone to bed tipsy, had only just come for the fox, and, fearing he was late, told Dirtiest of the Dirty to say what

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she did; which of course she had no hesitation in doing, lying coming quite as naturally as stealing to that elegant young lady.

Mrs. Somerville was downstairs already, but not in her sporting costume, it being one of her rules, when alone, always to put on her smart things after breakfast, considering that they ran more risk of damage at that meal than during all the rest of the day put together. 'And though she was not now finding her own clothes, or at least could have what she liked from London for sending for, and Betsey Shannon would only have been too glad of a cast-off, still, an early-acquired habit of neatness prevented her wasting the advantages afforded even by being on the free-list. So she was prudent even in her extravagance. Lucy was only a light breakfast eater, Facey a heavy one—a little dry toast, a cup of tea, and an egg sufficing for her, while our master indulged in oatmeal-porridge, pork-chops, rabbit-pies, cold game—the general produce of his gun, in fact.

So Lucy, having soon satisfied her appetite, withdrew with mamma, leaving our master of hounds to satisfy his appetite while she was adorning herself. At length he, too, was done, and pocketing a hunch of brown bread, he rang the bell, and told Dirtiest of the Dirty, who answered it, to send old Dirty to see about dinner.

"Now then, old gal," said he, as Mrs. Mustard appeared, smoothing her dirty apron as usual, "we shall be at home in good time I 'spect—say two, at latest; so do us those woodcocks, and make us a good apple-pie, or an apple-puddin', if you like it better."

"How many woodcocks would you please to have, sir?" asked Mrs. Mustard.

"Oh, do them all," replied Mr. Romford, "do them all—only three—no use makin' two bites of a cherry. Here!" continued he, "mind, make a good big pie—as big as a foot-bath—not one of your little tartlet-like things that only aggravate the appetite, and do it no good. Besides, I like cold apple-pie," added he, now turning round to light his

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old briar-root pipe, which he had been arranging as he spoke, at the fire. Ere he had resumed his erect position and emitted the inaugural puff, Mrs. Somerville re-entered attired for the chase. She was beautifully dressed, for, though she knew there was no meet, yet it was impossible to say who she might see; added to which it was so much pleasanter and more comfortable being smart and fit to meet anybody, instead of having to shirk and avoid people in consequence of being shabby. So she had on a smart new hat, with an exquisitely cut eight-guinea habit braided in front, and beautifully made chamois-leather trousers with black cloth feet. Altogether as neat as neat could be.

Nor did she mar the general effect, as some ladies do, by wearing soiled or shabby gloves. On the contrary, she had on a pair of smart new primrose-coloured kids that fitted with the utmost exactitude. She had got a beautiful gold-mounted whip down from London, with a light-blue silk tasselled cord through its ruby-eyed fox-head handle.

Mr. Romford, however, did not reciprocate his *pseudo*-sister's smartness, but turned out in a very rough poacher-like garb, viz., a slouching brown wideawake, a dirty ditto suit of heather-coloured Tweed, with the trod out trousers thrust into the original old rusty-looking lack-lustre Napoleons. But Mr. Romford could ride in anything, and, moreover, thought if the fox wouldn't run, he would come home with the hounds and go out with his gun after the wild ducks or snipes on Mabbleford Mere. He liked to be doing. So now let us assist him in his laudable design of activity.

Punctual to a minute—for those who want to have punctual servants must be punctual themselves—Mr. Romford and Mrs. Somerville appeared at the front door of Beldon Hall, and there were the hounds and horses occupying the gravelled ring before the house. The array was not very imposing, but a deal of execution lurked under that quiet exterior. Mr. Romford did not subscribe to the doctrine that a "hound was a hound," on the contrary, he knew there was as much difference among dogs as there was among men, and he made it a rule to have

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value received for his oatmeal. And though he had not taken his best, yet he had drawn his ten couple with such ability that, thanks to the excellence of their blood, they were as formidable as many people's twenty couple.

"Now then!" cried Facey, as he opened the hall door, "bring up your missis's horse first," calling to Short, now in charge of the prank-playing Leotard.

"Better not call me missus," whispered Lucy, adding, "it might make them talk."

"Mrs. Somerville's horse!" then exclaimed Facey, in a louder tone, as if to obliterate the first order, and in an instant Leotard was alongside the door-step. Lucy then placing her right hand on the crutch presented her pretty little foot to our friend, who lifted her up with airy buoyancy into her saddle. A shake of the smart habit, and she had herself adjusted in a moment. Romford then vaulted gaily into his own on the back of the all-powerful Baker. Having got him short by the gag, he gave him a kick in the ribs with his spurless heel, that as good as said, "now then, old boy, let's see whether you or oi will be master." "Cop, come away!—Cop, come away!"—he added, to the hounds, without noticing the Baker's semi-kick in return. Away they swept from the door and trotted along with the pride of the morning.

Proudlock, the keeper, had trotted off on Tom Hooper, the blacksmith's pony, some half-hour before, to enlarge the fox in the retired recesses of High Thorn Wood, but it so happened that there were two parallel ravines, viz., High Thorn Wood and North Spring Wood, so exactly alike that Mr. Romford mistook them, and ran his hounds up the first one he came to, where fox there was none, instead of following the Kingsfield-road, half-a-mile further on, and turning up the clear pebbly brook on the left. The consequence was, that, though he gave his hounds plenty of time, he never got a touch of a fox; a fact that puzzled our friend considerably, seeing, as Beckford says, that a bag-fox must needs smell extravagantly—especially a bag-fox that had been up to Leadenhall Market, and down again, all round about the country.

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Nevertheless, it was so, and Facey got to the rising ground at the top of the ravine without a challenge—nay, without even a whisper, save from Prosperous making a dash at a rabbit. He then reconnoitred the country.

“Wrong shop!” at last said he, as, casting his eye to the south, he saw the duplicate wood bounding the horizon—“wrong shop!” repeated he, turning his horse short round, giving a slight twang of his horn, and telling Lucy to put the hounds on after him. So friend Facey trotted briskly along the wood-side he had just come up, followed by such of the hounds as saw him turn, while Lucy essayed to bring the rest on after him. He then retraced his steps as quickly as he could, and regaining the Kingsfield-road went pounding along in search of his servant. There, on a white roadside gate, holding his pony, sat the all-important Proudlock, wondering what had happened to Mr. Romford.

“Wish you mayn’t ha’ given him o’er much law,” now observed he, as Romford came trotting up.

“What, he’s fresh, is he?” asked our master.

“Fresh as a four-year-old—went off like a shot,” replied Proudlock.

“So much the better,” rejoined Romford. “Don’t care if he beats us;” adding to himself, “no credit in killin’ a bag-fox—rather a disgrace, oi should say.”

Mrs. Somerville then came cantering up, with the remaining hounds frolicking about her horse, and Mr. Romford having now got his short pack reunited, Proudlock opened the gate into the wood, and in they all went together.

“Half way up the ride I struck him,” said Proudlock, “and he went briskly away as far as ever I could see.”

“All right,” said Romford, trotting on briskly.

And sure enough, just where a large wind-blown beech formed a comfortable resting-place for our friend after his exertions in carrying the fox, a sudden thrill of excitement shot through the pack as though they had been suddenly operated upon by a galvanic battery, and away they all went with an outburst of melody, that alarmed every denizen of the wood.

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"That's him!" exclaimed Proudlock, coming up at a very galloping, dreary, done, sort of pace—refreshing the old pony with a knotty dog-whip as he rode.

"No doubt," replied Romford, getting the now pulling Baker well by the head. Lucy did the same by Leotard, and away they scuttled up the green ride together, leaving friend Proudlock immeasurably in the lurch. It is a sorry performance to see a retired giant toiling after a pack of hounds on a broken-winded pony.

The fox, however, had not made his exit on arriving at the rough oak rails at the top of the ride that commanded the open; for though there was nothing to impede his progress, still he was confused and uncomfortable, and had not got the cramp out of his legs from confinement in the box, so that the Romford digression into the wrong wood was very convenient, and the fox availed himself of it to take a quiet trial of speed by himself along a grassy slope to the left. The further he went, the fresher he got, till he felt himself regaining his pristine strength; and after two or three rolls and stretches on the grassy mead, was beginning to cast about for a permanent resting-place, when the light note of Romford's horn, calling his hounds out of the first cover, came wafted on the breeze to where he was, now in the full enjoyment of his delectable liberty.

One twang was enough. It shot through his every nerve, and flourishing his brush with a triumphant whisk, he trotted away at a good, steady, holding pace, keeping as much out of sight by following the low grounds as he could. For he argued, very rationally, that even if the horn boded him no harm, still he was just as well in one strange place as another; while if it was any of those troublesome hunters in search of one of his class, the greater distance he placed between them and himself the better. So he went steadily on, not running to exhaust himself, but going as if he felt quite grateful for his freedom, and determined to do his utmost to retain it. Meanwhile friend Romford, with his short but efficient pack, had opened on his line, and the first outburst of melody coming down wind,

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confirmed the fox's worst suspicions as at first excited by the twang of the horn.

He had now little doubt it was the hounds, if not after him, after one of his own species, for whom he did not care to stand proxy; so he employed a very vigilant eye in scanning the country, with ears well back to catch any extraneous sound that might come. He wasn't going to be caught, if he could help it. And Romford being a fair-dealing man, and not at all inclined to take advantage of an over-matched animal, let his mettlesome hounds flash half over the fallow outside the wood without calling them back, though truthful Vanquisher refused to go an inch beyond the oak rails. Then when their misleading notes gradually died out, Vanquisher's deep-toned tongue was heard proclaiming the right line to the left, and back they all swung, dashing and hurrying as if to snatch the laurels of accuracy from his brow. And when they got to where the fox had rolled, there was such a proclamation of satiety as sounded like the outburst of forty mouths instead of twenty. Still it was not a great scenting day; but Mr. Romford did not care for that, and went as leisurely along as a master of harriers, instead of bustling and aggravating his great round shoulders into convulsions, as was his wont when he had a bad scent and a good fox before him. Indeed, he kept looking about in all the unlikely places for a wild fox to be, fearing lest the unfortunate fugitive should fall into the jaws of the pack without a chance for his life. But our worthy master was too careless, or too conscientious, for while he was thus dallying, letting the hounds hunt every yard of the scent, the fox was pursuing the even tenor of his way, over Linton Lordship, and so across Makenrace Common to Arkenfield.

It was a captious, fleeting, catching scent, the hounds sometimes running almost mute, and sometimes tearing along with such a chorus of melody as looked as if they would change from scent to view, and run into him in a minute.

"Look out, Lucy!" Facey kept exclaiming, "look out! he's somewhere here;" but still the fox showed not, and first one hound and then another led the onward chorus, just as Romford

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expected to be handling him. And now the cry of the hounds attracted the roving population of the country. Mr. Makepiece, the Union Doctor, Header, the horse-dealer, Herdman, the cattle-jobber, and Bartlett, the capless butcher's boy, on an extremely fractious tail-foremost chestnut pony.

"Is it a fox or a har?" asked Header, not knowing what to make of the medley.

"How far hev ye brought him?" demanded the butcher's boy; but Mr. Romford didn't deign to give an answer to either.

"Keep that fiery steed of yours off the hounds," was all the notice he took of the latter.

Then the hounds, having got upon a sound old pasture, set to running with such determined energy and vehemence, that, for the first time since they found, or rather went away, Facey kicked the Baker into a canter. Away Lucy and he went at a pace that, with the aid of a hog-backed stile out of the pasture, a wall out of the next field, and a scientifically-cut hedge beyond, soon shook off their recently joined comrades.

The hounds had now been running some five-and-twenty minutes or more, and Facey began to think better of the bagman than before; he almost thought he might beat them; didn't care if he did. "Poor is the triumph over the timid bagman," said he.

The country, which had been cramped and awkward at first, now gradually improved—more grass, larger fields, fewer trees. If the fox did not take the best line that he might, he took far from a bad one; and, moreover, avoided all those points of publicity that too palpably betray the stranger. Lucy half thought he might be a wild one they had got on by mistake, but Facey saw by the want of confidence among his hounds, and the vacillating course of the animal, that it was not the real thing. Indeed, at times, if he hadn't known it was a fox, he would have thought he was hunting a hare. So he cheered and encouraged the hounds in an easy careless sort of way, still letting them do their own work. "No use keepin' a dog, and barkin' one's self," thought he, as he slouched his great self in his saddle on the now placid Joe Baker. "If they can't tell

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which way he's gone, sure I can't," continued he, watching their working. "Deuced good lot of hounds," added he, admiring their performances. Then they went away again with a screech.

At the cross roads by Welton Pound up came Timothy Scorer, the perennially drunken horsebreaker, in a high state of excitement, on a sweaty curly-coated bay filly, with its head all over entanglement, like the bowsprit of a ship. Tim had met the fox full in the face by the reservoir of Thistleworth Mill, and had not yet got over his astonishment at the sight.

"Biggest fox that ever was seen! Had nearly knocked his mar off her legs," he said, his spluttering vehemence contrasting with Mr. Romford's easy indifference.

"Nearly knocked the mar off her legs!" exclaimed Timothy, trying to wheel her round out of the way of the hounds.

"You don't say so," replied Romford. "Why, it must have been a wolf or a ram!"

Wolf or fox, the hounds kept steadily on, if not with so good a scent as before, still with a holding one that occasionally rose into running.

And getting now into a more populous country, the magnetic influence of a pack of hounds again operated on the casual horsemen; and by the time the pack skirted the little agricultural village of Pendleton, the field had swelled to the number of six—viz., Mr. Smith, the miller of the aforementioned Thistleworth Mill; Lawson, the road surveyor; Dweller, the auctioneer; Facey, and Lucy; with a fustian-clad servant on a white pony, who seemed inclined to give the letter-bag a round with the hounds, instead of carrying it on to its destination.

Here, too, there were symptoms of landlord farming—greener fields, trimmer fences, better gates. And, a wretched tailless cur having chased the fox, and in his vehemence nearly knocked his own stupid brains out against a rubbing post, the line now took over that improved country, with a still further diminished scent, in consequence of the encounter from the cur.

If well-kept fences are more pleasant to the eye, they have the disadvantage of being more difficult to get over; and those

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that our friends now approached were so carefully tended, so skilfully mended with old wire-rope, as scarcely to present any preferable place. It was pretty much of a muchness where they took them. However, neither Facey nor Lucy were people to turn away; and, after two or three well-executed leaps, they were rewarded by getting into more open and park-like ground. Indeed, they were in a park—none other than Tarring Neville Park, the seat of our distinguished friend, Mr. Hazey, though a well-wooded hill at present shut out the mansion from their view. On, on they went! Facey more bent on watching the working of his hounds, than mindful of the country through which they were passing. And, as the line of scent inclined down the now grassy slope, of course Facey followed down the grassy slope; and as it then diverged along the side of a sparkling stream, why, along the side of the sparkling stream he went also, wondering, as he rode, whether there were any trout in it. “Shouldn’t be s’prised if there were,” he said.

And as the hounds were casting about here, there, and everywhere—Romford acting “sleeping partner” as before—a puffing, turban-capped youth suddenly rushed up, and breathlessly demanded to know “what they were doing there?”

“Hunting a fox, to be sure,” replied Facey, holding his hounds on towards an enclosed belt of wood by the side of the stream.

Then the youth looked at Romford, and Romford looked at the youth; and it occurred to them simultaneously that they had seen each other before.

“Why, it’s Mr. Romford, isn’t it?” asked the youth, now appealing to Lucy, who was putting on the hounds to her brother; “and Mrs. Somerville,” added he, taking off his cap respectfully to the handsome lady as he spoke.

“Oh, Mr. Hazey! how do you do?” rejoined our fair friend, leaning forward and tendering him her hand; Lucy’s quicker perception enabled her to detect in the heterogeneous garments the smart young gentleman who accompanied his father to call upon them on the Sunday.



BEATEN BY THE BAGMAN.

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It was, indeed, Bill—Hazey's boy Bill—now sent out to discharge (for the thirteenth time) old Mr. Muggeridge, as Hazey thought, from towling about Tarring Neville with the rum-and-milk harriers. Finding his mistake, Bill was anxious to efface the abruptness of his inquiry, and now ran on alongside of Lucy to where Romford was still holding his feathering hounds on the waning scent. The more likely the fox seemed to beat Facey, the more anxious Facey felt to beat the fox. "Didn't do to be beaten by a bagman!" he muttered.

"Mr. Romford! Mr. Romford!" now exclaimed Lucy, coming up with Bill and a couple-and-a-half of straggling hounds; "here's Mr. Hazey! here's Mr. Hazey!"

"Hazey, is there?" retorted Romford; adding to Affable, "*for-rard on*, good bitch! *for-rard on*! How are you, sir?" continued he, looking hastily over his shoulder, adding, "Oh, it's you, is it?" seeing it was the son; "how are ye? How's the old 'un?" meaning his brother master of hounds. "Yoicks, Challenger: good dog—speak to him again! How's the old 'un?" repeated he, turning again to his hounds.

"Nicely, thank you; how are you?" replied the boy Bill.

"You've not seen the fox, have you?" asked Mr. Romford, without noticing the inquiry after his own health.

"No," replied Bill.

"Deuced odd," rejoined Mr. Romford; "deuced odd. Ran him quite briskly up to within half-a-mile of this place, since when the scent's been gettin' weaker and weaker. Humph!" added he, as he sat watching the energies of the hounds gradually subsiding. "Seems to be gone altogether!" muttered he. "What place is this?" now demanded Mr. Romford of his young friend.

"This!" replied Bill. "This is Tarring Neville—our place, you know."

"Tarring Neville, is it?" muttered Facey. "Well, mind," added he, after a pause, "I brought this fox out of my own country," fearing lest old Hazey might make reprisal upon him; adding, "and if I can kill him above ground, you know, I may."

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The scent, however, now failed altogether—even yellow-pied Vanquisher gave it up.

“I’ll just make one cast,” observed Facey, half to Lucy, half to himself; and then, turning to Bill, he added, “and we’ll come up to the stables and get some gruel for the horses.”

“Do,” replied Bill; adding, “and some breakfast for yourselves.”

“Breakfast!” muttered Facey; “more like dinner, I should think!” forgetting how early he had come out.

He then cast his hounds for the first time during the run, making a very comprehensive semicircular advance, which brought him right in front of Tarring Neville.

“Not a bad-like shop,” observed Facey to Lucy, as he kept one little roving pig-eye on his hounds, the other on the house.

“No, it’s not,” replied Lucy; adding, “I vote we go in and see what it’s like inside;” adding, “they were all over ours, you know.”

“Too much bother,” rejoined Facey; “the women will be all astir.”

“Oh, never mind that,” said Lucy. “Let’s see what they are like.”

Facey still kept holding his hounds on, more for the sake of making a survey of the place, than in any expectation of their hitting off the scent. At last he came to a swing cattle-gate, across a widish brook at the far end of the lawn; and, the country beyond not appearing inviting, he resolved to give in, hoping that Hazey might hunt the fox back into his country some other day.

“No use potterin’ on after the beggar any longer,” said he, turning the reluctant Baker round, with a “Cop—come away! cop—come away!” to his hounds. “First bagman I ever hunted,” said Facey, “and it shall be the last. Do one’s hounds more harm than enough.”

So saying, he kicked the Baker into a trot, and swung gaily over the green, as if to make the hounds believe he had done all he intended. He had got the Baker’s back down at all events; and would have him quiet for the next day he was wanted.

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"I should like a cup of tea very much now," said Lucy, reverting to Bill's proposal.

"Dash you and your tea! You women are always wanting tea—should go about with a kettle tacked to your saddles," replied Romford.

"Well, I'm sure it's a very harmless beverage."

"Harmless enough," retorted Facey, "but it does you no good."

"Well, there's not much feeding in it, perhaps; but, still, it's very refreshing."

"Well, then, come and refresh yourself," said Facey, turning his horse's head towards the house, with a view of encountering the crinolines.

So they jogged over the greensward to the stables, Facey thinking, as he looked at his old lack-lustre boots, that Lucy would have to do the decorative part of the entertainment, as he was only in very "so-so" guise. He would rather have his hot woodcocks at home, than damage his appetite by anything he might get at Hazey's. However, he would see how the land lay.

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

TARRING NEVILLE.



R. HAZEY'S boy Bill, in the exercise of a wise discretion, had run back to the house to give the alarm of "Company coming! company coming!" while Mr. Romford made his final cast for his fox about the place. Bill informed his beloved parents in breathless haste as they still sat at their morning meal, that it wasn't old Muggeridge who was towling about the grounds with the rum-and-milk harriers, but no less a personage than the great Mr. Romford, who, with his sister, Mrs. Somerville, he believed was coming in to breakfast. He did not say that he had asked them, lest that should have been wrong, but left it to be inferred that they had invited themselves.

"Breakfast!" ejaculated Hazey, throwing down his "Times," and glancing at his garments.

"Breakfast!" exclaimed Mrs. Hazey, thinking of her cream, eggs, and honey.

"Breakfast!" repeated Miss, recollecting that she looked rather yellow as she dressed.

And away they all started on their respective reviserships. But the boy Bill, having been seen, stood his ground in the way of dress, and confined his endeavours to rousing the establishment.

"Look sharp! look sharp!" was the cry; "there's company coming! there's company coming!"

And the news flew with such electricity that when our master and Mrs. Somerville rode into the stable-yard, sly Silkey the groom and a couple of helpers were on the look-out for their

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horses, while a lad held back the door of a loose-box for the reception of the hounds. Having dismounted and got the latter housed, Facey locked the door, and putting the key in his pocket, proceeded to assist his sister to descend from her horse. A light bound from the saddle landed her on the ground, when, having shaken out her habit, she arranged it becomingly, with a due regard to the interests of her pretty booted feet and neatly fitting trousers. In truth Lucy looked very lovely. Her smart habit showed her natural figure to advantage, and the fine fresh morning air had imparted a genial glow to her bright complexion. Her hair, too, was all right.

"Now," said Facey to Silkey, "you give these horses half a pail of gruel and a feed of corn apiece;" adding, "and don't take the saddles off, but throw a rug over each of them;" so saying he stamped the thick of the mud sparks off his rusty Napoleons, and then proceeded to follow Lucy, who was already tripping along the gravel walk to the house.

"Rot the women," muttered he, eyeing her; "they are never happy unless they are pokin' their noses into each other's houses. Can't possibly be hungry so soon."

"Now, who are you goin' to ax for?" demanded he, overtaking her just as she gained the little iron wicket at the end of a well-kept gravel walk that evidently led to the front of the house.

"Oh, there's no occasion to ask for any one," replied Lucy; "just ring the bell; they asked us in, you know."

"Humph," rejoined Romford; "not so clear that they meant us to come, though."

"Well, if they didn't, it will teach them to be more truthful another time," replied Lucy, laughing; "besides," added she, "this will do instead of returning their call, you know."

"Hut, oi never meant to return it," growled Romford.

Tarring Neville now resembled a theatre at the critical moment of ringing up the curtain. Whatever bustle and confusion may have prevailed behind the scenes, all must be hushed and still at that momentous summons. So at Tarring Neville, when the ominous front door bell sounded there was

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an end of hurry and preparation. Basket the butler suddenly dropped from a trot to a walk; Henry the footman ceased fumbling at his coat-cuffs; the breakfast tableau was recomposed, Mrs. Hazey, in command of the teapot as before, while Hazey subsided, "Times" in hand, into his arm-chair, as though he had been sitting quietly at his meal, instead of having been to his dressing-room to exchange a shabby old silk frayed surtout for a smartish coatee and fancy vest.

"Mr. Romford and Mrs. Somerville," now proclaimed stage-manager Tomkins, opening the breakfast-room door, when up started Hazey, laying down the "Times," as though quite surprised and overjoyed at the announcement. He *was* rather pleased, for he was half inclined to think the Romfords wouldn't visit him, and then adieu to his chance of a deal.

"My dear Mrs. Somerville, how do you do?" exclaimed he, advancing and grasping her hand fervently; adding, "let me introduce Mrs. Hazey. Mrs. Hazey, Mrs. Somerville; Mrs. Somerville, Mrs. Hazey. Then, while the ladies were bobbing and curtsying and showing each other their teeth, he turned to Romford, who was making a comparison greatly in favour of Lucy, and, shaking hands with him, said, "This is indeed quite an unexpected pleasure. Up betimes this morning, I guess—early bird that gets the worm, eh?"

"Doesn't always get the fox though," replied Facey, with a chuckle.

"What! you've been hunting, have you?" exclaimed Hazey, with well-feigned surprise, ignoring the boy Bill's visit, old Muggeridge, and all the out-door proceedings. "Well," continued he, seeing the action of the ladies' backs fast subsiding, "let me introduce Mrs. Hazey. Mr. Romford, my dear," added he, "brother master of hounds; so glad to see you, Romford, you can't think," continued he, knocking off the mister, and turning again to his guest, adding, "now pray be seated and have some breakfast, and tell us all about it. Where will you sit, Mrs. Somerville? Where will you sit, Mr. Romford? Stay, Mrs. Somerville, I'll pull the blind down, and keep the sun off your eyes," so saying he lowered

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the shade, and Mrs. Somerville, conscious of a healthy complexion, sat boldly down with her face to the light.

The footmen and Tompkins then came in, the former bearing a tray with a reinforcement of cups and other crockery ware, in the midst of which rose the tall form of a coffeepot, with its usual accompaniments of hot milk and sugar, together with hot toast, hot rolls, hot everything. Mr. Romford took tea, and Mrs. Somerville took coffee, and our master nearly knocked the bottom out of a muffin plate by leistering two layers of roll with his fork at a blow. Hazey congratulated himself that it wasn't his No. 1 set when he heard it. "Rough fellow, that Romford," thought he, eyeing his muscular arm; "strikes as if he was pronging a salmon."

And now the usual sound of eating being established, after a careful listen at the door, Miss Anna Maria made her appearance, as if for the first time that morning, taking the chance of her breakfast things either being removed, or of Mrs. Somerville not noticing them. The fact was, Miss, considering the importance of the occasion, had determined, as she glanced at herself in the cheval glass, to make a complete revision of her person, regardless of the time it would require; and so, beginning with the damask cheek, she removed the before-mentioned pallor by the slightest possible touch of rouge, and that giving satisfaction, she then proceeded to array herself in a charming *négligée* of black and violet *fouillard*.

Miss Hazey was a pretty, sunny, blue-eyed girl of some twenty years of age, with a terrible taste for coquetting, which she gratified in the most liberal and promiscuous way. Lawyers, doctors, curates, soldiers, sailors, all were alike to her. Indeed, her sole employment seemed to be winning men's hearts, and throwing them away. Her own was said to be equal parts steel and whalebone. Such was the young lady who now re-entered the dining-room at Tarring Neville, with the full determination of trying the force of her artillery upon the great and desirable Mr. Romford. It was not every day that she had such a chance.

Miss gave a well-feigned start, as if surprised at the

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unexpected presence of strangers, which mamma seeing, and knowing her talent for dissimulation, seconded by exclaiming, "Oh, come in, my dear! come in! It's Mr. and Mrs. Romford—I beg pardon, Mr. Romford and Mrs. Somerville. They've been out hunting already this morning, while you, idle girl, have been dozing in bed." Then, turning to Mrs. Somerville, who was just chipping the shell of a guinea-fowl egg, she said, "This is my daughter, Anna Maria, Mrs. Somerville: Mr. Romford, my dear." Whereupon Miss Anna Maria gave two of her best Brighton boarding-school curtsies, and took up a favourable position, with her back to the light, immediately opposite our master. As she unfolded her napkin, she looked deliberately at him, and thought what a queer-looking man he was,—queer eyes, queer nose, queer hair, queer altogether. "Must be rich," thought she, "he's so ugly." And Facey, peering at her out of the corners of his little pig eyes, thought she was just as smart a little girl as ever he had seen—uncommonly smart little girl—just his fancy of a girl, in fact. He then leistered the other layer of roll. And now Mr. Hazey, wishing to know to what cause they were indebted for the honour of this early visit—especially to know how Mr. Romford's hounds came to be in his country—essayd to direct the conversation into the hunting line.

"So you didn't kill the fox, you say?" observed he, reverting to Mr. Romford's early-bird rejoinder; "so you didn't kill the fox, you say?"

"No," replied Romford, "no. Fact was, I didn't care much about killin' him."

"Must have been a good fox, though," observed Mr. Hazey; "brought you a long way out of your country, you know;" wondering whether Mr. Romford had been drawing his (Mr. Hazey's) outside cover, Ravensclugh Gorse, on the sly.

"No, not a bad fox," assented Romford; "not a bad fox. Indeed, that made me less anxious to kill him. You see, we had a blank day yesterday, and I thought if I could blood a few couple of hounds with a bad fox it would keep them steady for

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Saturday ; but, as usual, when one wants a bad fox, one gets a good 'un, and he brought us here to breakfast with you. I've left him somewhere about your place here," added he.

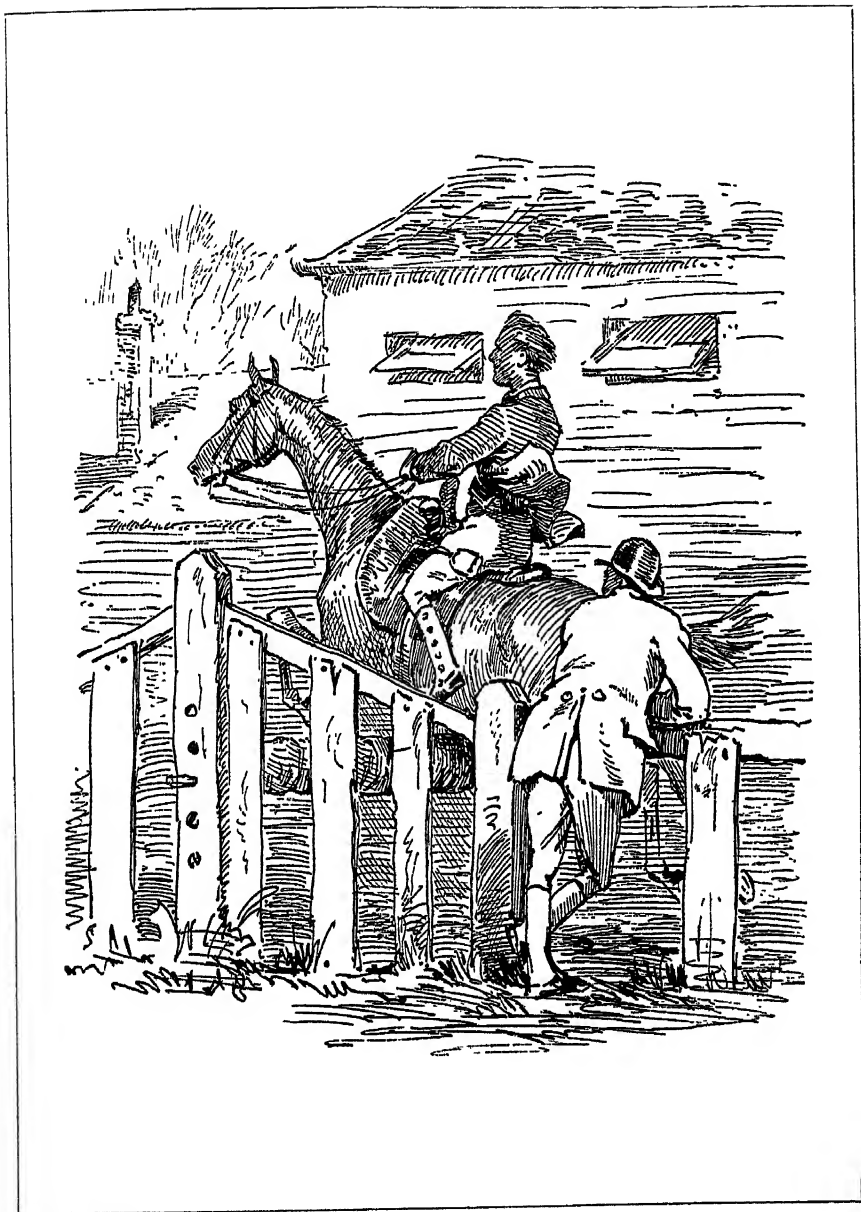
"Ah, well, I'm much obliged. I'll hunt him back to you some day," replied Mr. Hazey.

"Do," replied Mr. Romford, "and kill him, if you can, in the open ; but mind, don't dig him !" added he, glancing significantly at Hazey, who was rather addicted to digging.

"Oh, no ! honour bright !" replied his host. "Wouldn't do such a thing for the world !"

"Wouldn't trust you," thought our master, remembering the character Independent Jimmy gave him.

Ladies are generally better hands at talking and eating at the same time than gentlemen are. At all events, Lucy eclipsed Mr. Facey in that performance ; for she chattered away, while Facey, in schoolboy parlance, "let his meat stop his mouth." She talked about the opera, and she talked about the Prince and Princess of Wales, and she talked about the Court, and she talked of great people in such a social way, that Mrs. Hazey felt as if she was regularly inducted into high life. It was quite clear Mrs. Somerville moved in the highest circles ; and Mrs. Hazey thought what an advantage it would be to her daughter if Mrs. Somerville would take Anna Maria by the hand. So she smiled, and simpered, and assented to everything Mrs. Somerville said, mingling her applause with judicious appliances of coffee and tea. And Lucy, being pleased with her reception, and the evident respect that was paid to her, laid herself out to be extra-agreeable, and talked very magnificently of herself and her doings, and said that though Beldon Hall was a very comfortable place, yet it wasn't so good a house as she expected to find it. And Miss Anna Maria, who always let the gentlemen digest her beauty properly before she began to exercise her arts and allurements, now seeing Mr. Romford examining her attentively, just went on playing with her breakfast, exhibiting first her pretty hand, then her pretty teeth, next her pretty dimples, by a smile ; until thinking he was ready for the grand assault of the tongue, she fixed the artillery of her beautiful,



"MY BOY BILL" ON LEOTARD.

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well-fringed blue eyes full upon him, and asked if he was fond of archery.

"Oh, why, yes—no ; oi mean oi don't care a great deal about it. Pretty amusement enough. Day should be fine, though," added he, " or it's very poor fun."

"Yes, the day should be fine," assented Miss Hazey, who had been drenched in a thunderstorm at the last one she was at.

They then indulged in a slight discussion upon fishing, at which, of course, Facey was more at home ; in the midst of which, breakfast being at length concluded, Mrs. Hazey offered Mrs. Somerville the great feminine treat of showing her over her house. Facey and Hazey then, we need scarcely say, paired off to the stables.

While the foregoing scene was enacting in the house, "my boy Bill," ever anxious for reliable information, and always more happy in the stables than in the parlour, had slunk away to the former, there to see what he could make out of Mr. Romford's horses. And Leotard having finished the very moderate feed of corn Mr. Silkey, the groom, vouchsafed him, now began sniffing and staring about, as horses will sniff and stare about in a strange stable ; in this case, perhaps to see if there was any more corn coming. Then, as "Satan still," as it has been beautifully expressed, "finds work for idle hands to do," so the boy Bill bethought him he would give Leotard a round in the exercising ground at the back of the stables, and put him over the leaping bar, and a few of the make-believe fences his father had established for the purpose of training his horses. So he told a helper to put on the bridle, and this being done, and the horse led forth, Bill mounted in the confident sort of way that a man mounts a lady's horse, thinking, if a lady can ride him, anybody else can. And it was lucky that Bill began calmly, for a side-saddle not affording a very eligible investment for a gentleman's person, if Bill had begun either in the bucketing or the timorous strain, Leotard would in all probability have kicked him over his head, whereas, Bill just employing the same light hand that Mrs. Somerville had used, the horse went poking along as quietly as could be, fulfilling

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all Bill's behests, first over the bar, then over the hurdle, next over the rail, and finally over the furze-coped on-and-off mound. And Bill, patting him on the safe completion of the last feat, thought he was quite as safe and clever a lady's horse as it was possible to find.

With this conviction he pulled up into a walk, and returned leisurely along to the stable, hoping he might not encounter Leotard's fair owner by the way. Luckily, however, he got safe back, and Silkey had the horse restored to its stall, and all the stables put into apple-pie order, ere his master came heralding the great Mr. Romford along to the stud. Some people have a wonderful pleasure in staring at horses—staring at them just as ladies stare at bonnets; the gentlemen, doubtless, thinking how well they would look on them, just as the ladies think how well they would look in them. Still, staring at horses is much more stupid than staring at bonnets, for with horses you haven't the whole case before you. If the bonnets were enveloped in tissue, or cap paper, as the horses are in clothing and straw, a very slight glimpse would satisfy the ladies; whereas one sees men—at Tattersall's, for instance—staring week after week at horses, who never buy a horse, who never bid for a horse, and who, if they had a horse, would very likely not know whether to mount at the right side or the left; yet, there they go—most likely taking a couple of catalogues each, pushing, and elbowing, and asking all sorts of absurd questions of the grooms and helpers, and finding all sorts of mare's-nests for themselves and their friends.

But our brother masters of hounds are now approaching the stables—sauntering along, each trying to make a mental estimate of the other. As in all show places, from Windsor Castle downwards, they begin with the smaller rooms first, and proceed to those of increased size and importance, until they culminate in the baronial or some great hall; so Mr. Hazey always passed an expectant purchaser through the servants' horses stable before introducing him to the grand exhibition of his own. On these interesting occasions our delicate-minded master had hitherto always pretended to play second fiddle to

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Silkey, who had a most insinuating way of recommending a horse, never pressing him, indeed, but rather expressing his reluctance to part with him; always declaring in confidence to a customer that he thought he was "just about the very best 'oss he ever had through his hands, but master really was so 'ticlar and fanciful that there was no sich thing as pleasing him. If an 'oss pulled an ounce more than he liked, he would part with him; if he went a little gayer at his fences than he was accustomed to, he would cast him. Although there was no such thing as suiting him."

"Ah, sir," Silkey would conclude, with a sigh, and a shrug of his shoulders, "I wish I had all the money master has wasted in 'osses since I first came to him—make me a very comfortable independence, I assure you."

If Silkey had put it the other way, and said if he had all the money he had helped his master to cheat other people of, he would not have been far wrong in his assertion.

Now, however, since the boy Bill came home he had rather taken the initiative out of Silkey's hands, though, to do Bill justice, he was clever enough to strike out a fresh line of his own, and, instead of "but"-ing, like Silkey, he used to praise the horse they wanted to sell, or, rather, the horse they thought the other party wanted to buy, so superlatively—Bill declaring he didn't think his father would part with him for "any money"—that instead of taking a trifle off the price as the "but" used to do, it enabled Mr. Hazey to put something on; a much more agreeable process than the other. But Silkey waxed sulky under the change, considering that no gentleman ought to interfere with the just prerogatives of his groom.

"The idea of using me so!" said Silkey to his friend Jawkins, the huntsman. "The idea of his using me so! *I* who always treated him like a brother!"

And now Mr. Hazey having got our great master Mr. Romford fairly through the servants' horses stables, gradually dropped astern as he came to his own, leaving the redoubtable Bill to pilot the way, and expatiate on their extraordinary merits as they went. This stable contained the joint-stock stud; viz.,

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Mr. Hazey's and the boy Bill's, but Bill thinking it would be more to the honour and glory of the establishment to announce them all as his father's, inducted our master into the presence with the observation, "Ah! these are the Governor's horses,—five for his own riding, you see—rather more than he wants, p'r'aps, for three days a week, but still he likes to be overhorsed, and doesn't care much about cost."

Then Bill went up first to Volunteer, then to Lottery, then to Gay and Sure, then to the Clipper, and lastly, to Topthorn, patting and praising and caressing them as though they were the greatest favourites under the sun, that no money could purchase, though in reality Volunteer was the only horse Hazey had had during the last season, and he, too, had been sold and returned, charged with having incipient cataract—of which little defect, of course, neither Hazey nor Silkey knew anything. He was now waiting for a convenient turn of the complaint to go up to the hammer to be sold as the property of a gentleman who never warranted, with Silkey to do the cajolers. "Sound an 'oss as ever stepped—master, full of fancies, doesn't know a good 'oss when he has one." That is, of course, always presuming that Silkey was properly primed and propitiated for the occasion.

And now the boy Bill, having at length concluded his loving laudations, his beloved parent came sauntering in from the other end of the stable, and, seeing that the performance was about over, just glanced his eye along the stalls, and then asked Mr. Romford to take a seat on the corn-bin and finish his pipe, an invitation that Romford readily complied with, and the two were presently in full puff.

Whiff, puff, whiff—"That's a good horse," said Hazey, nodding at Gay and Sure.

Puff, whiff, puff—"Is he?" said Romford, eyeing him.

Whiff, puff, whiff—"Gave a vast of money for him," observed Hazey.

"Fifty, p'r'aps," puffed Facey.

"*Fifty!*" ejaculated Bill—"four fifties, I should think, would be nearer the mark." They had given eighty, and got two back.

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And the ladies on their parts having equally interesting subjects to discuss, dawdled and sauntered; and Mrs. Hazey, in return for a delicate compliment on her daughter's beauty, having favoured Mrs. Somerville with a recital of her many eligible offers—knights, baronets, honourables, our fair friend, thinking her hostess seemed like a good conduit pipe, wherein to convey spurious information, essayed to return the compliment, by giving her a slight sketch of herself and her own career. To this end she informed Mrs. Hazey that she had two thousand a-year jointure, besides a pension as a field officer's widow, but that one thousand a-year would go from her if she married again; that her nephew Charley Somerville, of the Lady Killer Lancers, to whom the thousand a-year would go, would gladly compound with her for five hundred a-year, but that he was a very profligate young man, much addicted to casinos and sherry-cobblers, and she would not further his extravagance by any such arrangement; all of which Mrs. Hazey imbibed with great interest, but seemed to think there was no occasion for Mrs. Somerville to sacrifice herself to her naughty nephew. And having, like her husband, a keen eye to business, she began asking about the nephew's age and position, thinking, perhaps, her daughter could reclaim him from casinos and cobblers, all of which Mrs. Somerville answered satisfactorily; whereupon Mrs. Hazey very adroitly, as she thought, suggested, that if Mrs. Somerville felt a real interest in the young man's welfare, it might be the means of retrieving him from bad connections, to bring him down to Beldon Hall and give him some hunting. And Mrs. Somerville seemed at first to be rather taken with the idea, but on second thoughts, she felt it was of no use complicating matters, so she quashed the idea altogether, by saying he had a washball seat, and couldn't ride across country; adding that she never knew a casino frequenter who could; besides which, the Lady Killer Lancers were ordered to Dublin; so there was an end of the matter.

The mention of hunting, however, opened out the question how long Mrs. Somerville was going to stay in Doubleimupshire—a point that she was not at all inclined to enlighten Mrs.

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Hazey upon ; so looking at her pretty Geneva watch, set with brilliants (the unconscious gift of a west-end watchmaker), she exclaimed, " Oh, dear, do you know what o'clock it is ? I declare Mr. Romford will think I am lost. Oh, *do* let us go to the gentlemen ; I'd *no* idea it was half so late." So saying, she gathered up her habit very scientifically, and, piloted by Mrs. Hazey, proceeded to the stables by the short cut through the back yard, under a chain-rattling salute of *Bow-wow-wows* from a great black-and-white Newfoundland dog.

Entering the court, Mrs. Hazey made direct for her husband's stable, where, seated on the corn-bin, she found the gentlemen still continuing their smoking discussions.

" Ah, here you are at last ! " exclaimed Mr. Romford, as he got a glimpse of the habit ; " here you are at last ! " adding, " thought you'd gone to bed. Well, now," continued he, " let us be moving. Where are the horses ? Bid them put on the bridles, and turn their heads where their tails should be."

So saying, he got off the bin, and, pocketing his pipe, proceeded to stamp in a very would-be-doing sort of way.

" Oh, there's no hurry," observed Mr. Hazey ; " no hurry."

" Oh, no, no hurry," assented Mr. Romford ; " only the days are short, and one should make the most of what there is."

" Wouldn't you like to come and see our Dorking fowls and Dorsetshire ewes ? " now interposed Mrs. Hazey.

" After a bit," replied Romford, " after a bit, when one can have some mint sauce with them, you know," added he.

The sight of the habit had set the stable-men on the alert, and the bridles being adjusted, the horses were presently wheeling round in their stalls to be ready for mounting. And as Leotard's Arab-like head and snakey neck were followed by his elegant figure, Hazey stood by, drawing his breath, thinking how he would like to have the selling of him. There is nothing so lucrative, so money-making as a showy lady's horse. If the lady says " buy," it must be buy, whatever the price ; if she takes a dislike, the horse must be got rid of, whatever the sacrifice.

" Ah, that's a neat 'un," said Mr. Hazey to Lucy, with

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more than his usual candour. He generally praised with a reservation, an "if" or a "but;" and this piece of praise was the exception to the general rule. "Ah, that's a neat 'un," said he, conning him over. "Beautiful head and neck; best set-on tail I ever saw:" these being, as Hazey well knew, the cardinal points of a lady's horse.

"Yes he is," replied Lucy, now tendering him her taper hand; having already saluted Mrs. and Miss Hazey, and also the boy Bill.

"Good-bye, my dear Mrs. Somerville!" exclaimed Mr. Hazey, grasping it fervently; adding, "I'm very much obliged to the fox for bringing you here. Hope you'll come of your own accord next time."

"Thank you, Mr. Hazey," replied Lucy, now slightly raising her habit, and tendering her little foot for Romford to mount her.

The man of the muscular arm lifted her up as buoyantly as a cork. Drawing her thin reins, she touched Leotard lightly with the whip, and put him with his head on to slightly rising ground.

Romford noted the movement, and thought to reward Hazey's confidence by giving him a slight insight into Leotard's character.

"That's one of the most perfect lady's pads I ever saw," said Romford, taking Hazey a few paces off, so that he might contemplate him like a picture. "But he's just one fault—at least so my sister thinks; he wants a little driving at his fences, whereas she likes a free goer."

"Indeed!" said Hazey, noting the defect; and, being now down wind of Mrs. Hazey, he added (loud enough to be heard by Lucy), "Well, horse and rider are uncommonly handsome—perfect pictures both of them."

Then came out that magnificent weight-carrying hunter, "Pull Devil Pull Baker," with his great arms, magnificent shoulders, and lean handsome head—looking like a perfect Placid Joe, both in mind and manners.

"Ah, that's something like a horse!" exclaimed Mr. Hazey,

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his cold eyes sparkling with animation as he surveyed him. "That's something like a horse. Three 'undred guineas' worth, I guess."

"*Four*," replied Facey, confidentially; "leastways, two two's. Oi've a patent way," continued he, "of concealing my extravagancies, by giving two cheques for one horse: one on my London banker, and the other on my country one, so that neither of them know the extent of my gullibility."

"Well, but if you want to sell," suggested Mr. Hazey.

"Oh, then the horse speaks for himself," replied Mr. Romford. "It doesn't follow because oi give too much that another man must do the same. One always expects to lose by a horse."

So saying, Mr. Romford then approached and mounted the Baker, sitting in the ostentatious sort of way of a man who is conscious that he is cocked on the top of a "good 'un."

"What do you call him?" asked Miss Anna Maria, who had now joined the group.

"Placid Joe," replied Romford, patting him on the neck, well knowing it wouldn't do to call him by his right one.

"Ah, he looks very good-tempered," observed the lady.

All things being at length ready for a start, the loose-box door was opened, out came the hounds with a cry, when, with mutual adieus, away the cavalcade proceeded to find their way across country to Beldon Hall.

And Mr. Hazey having watched Leotard's action over the cobble-stones, to which he could take no exception whatever, and having seen the last loitering hound disappear, after a few moments lost in deep meditation, turned round to his wife saying, "Well, now, that's as rum a go as ever I saw in my life."

"How, my dear?" asked Mrs. Hazey, now duly impressed with the £2,000-a-year story.

"Well, the get-up, the turn-out, the whole thing," replied Mr. Hazey.

"Well, but it's only a chance visit, my dear," observed Mrs. Hazey.

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"True," said Hazezy, "true; but still he's a rum 'un anyhow."

"There's a good deal of character about him, certainly," assented his wife.

"I like his horses better than I do himself," observed Mr. Hazezy, after a pause. "But I do wonder that a man who can have such fine horses should not have a pair of better boots."

"Not particular about appearances, perhaps?" suggested Mrs. Hazezy.

"That's a nice nag, that cream-colour," observed Bill, now joining his beloved parents.

"Ah, we must keep an eye on him," said his father. "Shouldn't wonder if there might be a penny turned by that horse. What was it Romford said about him—that he didn't go freely at his fences, or something?"

"I think it was something of that sort," replied his wife, who did not take much interest in equestrian matters.

"Oh, I should say he was rather a nice fencer," observed Bill.

"How do you know?" asked his father.

"I tried him—tried him when you were all in at breakfast."

"Clever lad!" exclaimed Hazezy, patting him on the back. "Clever lad! Never miss a chance, that's a good fellow—always keep your weather eye open, my boy;" so saying, the trio proceeded leisurely back to the house.

And as talks over are always mutual, Mr. Romford and Lucy had the Hazeys on the *tapis* as soon as the breadth of the Herdlaw road enabled the hounds to get away from among their horses' feet.

"Well, and what did you make of Mother What's-her-name?" asked Mr. Romford, with a backward jerk of his head to indicate who he meant.

"Oh, well, she was very affable," replied Lucy.

"Well, but did you gammon her well?" asked Romford, meaning about himself.

"Oh, beautifully! Told her I had two thousand a year jointure, and I don't know what else."

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“ Oh, the deuce ! ” exclaimed Romford, “ but you shouldn’t have done that.”

“ Why not ? ” asked Lucy.

“ Why not ! ” repeated Romford, “ why, because you’ll have every unmarried man in the country after you.”

“ Well, but I told her I lost a thousand a year if I married again.”

“ Oh, that won’t stop them,” retorted Facey—“ that won’t stop them. Bless your heart, a thousand a year will draw men from all the corners of the earth. You should have said you lost it all, and then they would have abused Somerville, and it would have saved our door-bell. They’ll eat us out of house and home,” added he, thinking of the dreadful consequences of the invasion,—the disappearance of his cold meat, his cold game, his cold pie ; nay, he wouldn’t answer for his Saturday’s resurrection puddings, consisting of all the odds and ends of the week, being safe from the intrusion of the suitors.

Mr. Romford didn’t like it. No good could come of it, for she couldn’t marry with old Soapey alive, and to have his house besieged by all the idle fortune-hunters of the country was more than he could endure. And he jogged on silently in a very mystified contemplative mood, with an occasional pull of his beard, thinking he would have to rake and watch the gravel ring very attentively. But in his inmost thoughts came the conviction that Miss Hazey was much prettier than Miss Watkins, and, though it was very imprudent even thinking of her, his thoughts would run that way.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MR. AND MRS. HAZEY'S INVITATION



REAT as was Mr. Romford's general success in Doubleimupshire, both as a sportsman and a *protégé* of Lord Lovetin, in no part, perhaps, was it more signal than at Tarring Neville, where they looked upon him as a most desirable acquaintance, showing, at all events, that two of a trade do not always disagree. To be sure, Mr. Hazey thought that a man who was simple enough to keep foxhounds for a benevolent object—namely, founding an hospital for decayed sportsmen—might very likely be easily victimised in the matter of a horse; while Mrs. Hazey thought the owner of Abbeyfield Park, J.P., D.L., patron of three livings, would be an extremely eligible *partie* for her daughter. Not that she was mercenary; only she liked to see affluence. Love in a cottage found no favour with her. Love in a castle was a far better thing.

With feelings such as these, it was easily settled that the unexpected morning visit caused by the bag fox should stand in the place of a regular call; a return, in fact, of the pilgrimage that Hazey and the boy Bill made to Beldon Hall on the Sunday. That settled, and the larder and meets of the respective hounds being consulted, then came the question who they should ask,—whether Mr. Romford and his sister, or Mr. Romford alone; Mrs. and Miss Hazey thinking they would do as well without Mrs. Somerville; Mr. Hazey, on his part, contending that they would have no chance of getting Mr. Romford without Mrs. Somerville. Mr. Hazey was sure Mr. Romford wouldn't come alone. Didn't look at all like a

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man to dress up after hunting, to turn out again in the cold, to trail across country in the dead of winter for a dinner. He would be too careful of his carriage horses for that. Mrs. Hazey combated the objection by saying they could ask him to stay all night, and made some deprecatory remarks about the trouble of having women and their maids; adding, that Mrs. Somerville would, most likely, have some fine costly sensitive creature, who would be far more difficult to please than her mistress. But Mr. Hazey adhered to his opinion, that if they wanted Mr. Romford, they must ask Mrs. Somerville also; and dreading the "I told you so," if they failed in securing Mr. Romford, they were obliged to accede, and invite Mrs. Somerville as well.

So it was settled that both should be asked, Mrs. Somerville by the ladies, and Mr. Romford by the gentleman; and as the cards for the next week's meets of the hounds were just about to be issued, a lawn meet was made for Tarring Neville on Mr. Romford's non-hunting day. Then Anna Maria proceeded to draw up an elaborate but apparently off-hand document, in the familiar strain, on behalf of mamma, inviting her dear Mrs. Somerville to give them the pleasure of her company on Wednesday, and stay till Friday. And after several alterations of phrase, and careful guarding against Mrs. Somerville coming alone, she got the draft to her and mamma's liking; and, drawing out a sheet of superfine cream-laid note-paper (slightly scented), proceeded, with the aid of a new pen, to copy it in her best handwriting for sending. The new pen, like most new pens, didn't go freely at first; it was like a newly-shod horse wanting to find its feet, and the first note was condemned at the third line. The second was found no better, for she put two *n*'s into Wednesday; and in the third attempt the tiresome pen made a trip and a splutter at the word pleasure, and she couldn't think of sending that either. The fourth, however, she got to her mind, and presented to her mamma for approval. Thus it ran:—

"MY DEAR MRS. SOMERVILLE,—

"TARRING NEVILLE.

"It will give us sincere pleasure if this should be fortunate enough to find you disengaged, and if you would

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accompany Mr. Romford here on Wednesday, and stay till Friday. I fear we cannot offer you any great attractions; but the hounds will meet here on Thursday, and we hope you will bring your horse, and partake of the pleasures of the chase with the Hard and Sharp Hounds. Mr. Hazey joins in kind regards, and hopes to see you, with, my dear Mrs. Somerville, ever yours very sincerely,

“MARY HAZEY.”

And Hazey, albeit of the cozening order, was rather puzzled how to address our friend Mr. Romford, whether as “Dear Romford,” “Dear Mr. Romford,” “Dear Sir,” or how. “Dear Romford” would have done well enough to a three-days-a-week master, with a subscription; but here was a four-days-a-week one, with an occasional bye, who was going to devote his subscription to a charitable purpose. Then, if Hazey was to “sir,” “dear sir,” or “my dear sir” him, Mr. Romford might think it rather stiff; and, altogether, Hazey thought the best plan was to take the middle course, and “Mr.” him,—address him as “Dear Mr. Romford.” So our Master, having made up his mind on that point, echoed his daughter’s letter without the flummery; adding, that he had a stall for Mr. Romford’s horse, and thought he could promise him a good fox. And Mr. Hazey sealed it with a fine butter-pat-like coat of arms seal of many quarterings, many stags, many rings, many falcons, the whole surmounted by his crest of a lion with a kitchen-poker-like tail. Then the letters went to the post, and expectation presently stood on tip-toe, speculating whether they would come or not; Mrs. Hazey saying they would, Mr. Hazey taking the other side, and the boy Bill going halves with his father in a sixpenny bet on the event.

Facey was at the kennel when the letters came; but Lucy saw by the post-mark that they were from the same quarter, and anticipated the contents of her brother’s by her own. She was all for going, all for taking Leotard, all for making hay while the sun shone. But knowing that Facey would require a little coaxing, she didn’t meet him open-mouthed with his



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letter, lest Chowey, or Swig, or some of the queer ones might have gone wrong at the kennel, but kept it quietly in her work-box, till, having made a hearty dinner off hot beef pudding and Edinburgh ale, he had got half through a pipe and a whole glass of gin in his smoking chair, before she began.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed she, as if she had quite forgotten it until that moment, "I've a letter for you," rising, and pretending to bustle for it in her work-box.

"Letter (*puff*) for me" (*puff*), growled Facey. "Who can it be from?" taking the pipe from his mouth. Facey didn't like letters; he thought they might be disagreeable ones.

"Well, I think it's from Mr.—Mr.—what do they call him? Hard and Sharp, you know?"

"Oh, Hazey," said Romford, comforted by the sound, and turning half round in his chair to replenish his glass.

"Yes, Hazey," replied Lucy, producing the letter and giving it to him.

"Read it," said Romford, handing it back to her.

Lucy broke the seal and did as desired; while Facey resumed his beloved pipe.

"See him —— first," said Facey when she was done reading.

"Oh dear, but I should like to go!" exclaimed Lucy.

"But you're not axed," replied Facey, with a knowing leer of his little pig-eye.

"Yes, I am," rejoined Lucy, producing her card.

"Humph!" mused Facey, after a pause. "Don't think that'll pay!"

"Why not?" asked Lucy.

"Oh, bother of getting there—costs I don't know how much! Can hunt here, eat here, drink here,—do everything here that they propose doing there."

"Oh, but consider the society," observed Mrs. Sidney Benson, interposing in her daughter's behalf.

"Fiddle the society," said Romford; "oi can't make anything of the sort out of it."

The fact was, Facey had thought the Anna-Maria project over,

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and saw the imprudence of the idea. Dalberry Lees was clearly the place for his money.

Still Lucy returned to the charge. She wanted to go and air some of her fine clothes ; and if the money was the only obstacle, she thought she could get over that.

"Might ride our own horses over, and send Dirty with our things by the Oldbury coach," observed she.

"Ay, but it's about as much as oi can manish to mount myself with my own hounds," observed Facey, "without goin' to see other folks. Besides, Swig lamed Oliver Twist the last day we were out, and Bounding Ben and the grey are both coughing."

"Well, but you might ask H. to mount you," continued Lucy ; adding, "I dare say he'd be most happy to do so."

"Not quite so sure of that," said Facey, looking down at his big legs ; "rather above the mounting size, you see."

"Oh, but then you're a careful rider," rejoined Lucy, who was not easily turned from her point.

"That's as may be," said Romford ; "but, havin' a pack of hounds of my own—perhaps the best in England—with both wittles and drink in abundance, I don't see what earthly use it is goin' over there to get the very same things that one has here. That's not what they call the economy of labour."

The fact was, Facey was just a man for his food, and no more. He didn't want his appetite whetted and petted and coaxed ; and, having suffered the persecution of two parties, was not at all inclined to venture on a third. Besides, he had spent eighteen shillings in getting to Dalberry Lees, and that would serve him the rest of the season. Of course he hadn't given Independent Jimmy or the servants at the Lees anything ; but still the vehicle and the gates there and back had come to that amount. "It was payin' for being made miserable," he said. What good did it do him dinin' off plate ? He could eat off pewter quite as well, if not better. As to a fine bed, it was all lost upon him ; he was none the better for snoozin' in one—could sleep in a barn for that matter—under a haystack, if it didn't rain.

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“ Oh, but society—the pleasures of society ! A little change, you know, is always agreeable. It doesn't do for people to live too much alone—get awkward and stupid,” urged Lucy.

“ Well, *you* can go,” said Romford. “ Dirty and you can go by the coach, just as well as Dirty alone.”

“ I'm afraid they've blocked me for that,” replied Lucy ; “ they've only asked me if you go ; besides, it wouldn't look well for me to go by the coach, you know—coaches are only for common people.”

Puff, whiff, puff, went Mr. Romford, meditating the matter. “ Coach eighteen-pence, Dirty, say a shilling—two-and-six ; two-and-six there, two-and-six back—five shillings : not worth the money,” resolved he, turning in his chair. He then tried the expense of the other course—Dirty by the coach, Lucy and himself to ride. “ Coach for Dirty, say two shillin's or p'r'aps one-and-nine, if they made a stiff bargain ; then, two horses found for the night, say save eighteen-pence apiece at home by that ; two selves found, dinner and breakfast each—put it, then, at two shillin's a head altogether, that would be four shillin's, and three shillin's would be seven shillin's ; seven shillin's saved, except the one-and-ninepence or two shillin's for Dirtiest of the Dirty's fare—say five shillin's saved ; but then there would be no end of trouble and persecution, and eating and drinking things he didn't want.”

Lucy, however, combated all objections. She would arrange matters ; she would see and pack up his things, so that he should have nothing to do but get on to his horse and accompany her, and when he arrived at Tarring Neville he would find his things all laid out on the sofa before the fire, ready for putting on.

And Facey, despite all his prudence, having a lively recollection of the blue-eyed lady, and not altogether disinclined to see her again, at length gave a sort of silent assent, which Lucy immediately clenched by writing to her dear Mrs. Hazey, accepting Mr. Hazey's and her very kind invitation for her brother Romford and herself ; adding, that they would ride their own horses over, and she would send her maid by the

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coach, if her dear friend would have the kindness to send somebody to meet it.

So Mr. Hazey and his boy Bill lost sixpence between them on the event.

And, on the appointed day, Dirtiest of the Dirty was seen getting into the dribbling Oldbury coach at Beldon Hall lodges, on to the roof of which was then piled a quantity of luggage, looking as if the owners of it were going on a visit for a week. Dirty wore her Dalberry Lees pearl-and-ruby ring quite ostentatiously. The passengers being strangers to her, she of course thought she was equally unknown to them. So she bounced very considerably: telling them her lady was a nobleman's daughter; that she (Dirty) had lived with her two years; that when they left Beldon Hall, they were going to stay with the Queen at Pimlico Palace, and afterwards with Mr. Harker Tentrees at Bromley-by-Bow. Indeed, she talked so imposingly, that, what with her tongue and her fine attire, if she had not admitted her servitude, and also got in at the Beldon Hall lodges, her fellow-passengers would have doubted whether she was a Dirty or some young lady on a visit to our master.

Then, at a somewhat later hour of the day, Mr. Romford and Mrs. Somerville emerged on horseback from the Beldon Hall stable-yard—Mrs. Somerville on the redoubtable Leotard, Mr. Romford on the equally valuable Everlasting: our master having previously put the stable establishment under the surveillance of Mr. Proudlock the keeper; who, in his turn, was secretly watched by Billy Balsam; and Billy by Lucy's lynx-eyed mamma, Mrs. Benson.

Old Mother Benson, though not good enough to take abroad, was very useful at home; for, being of a wandering disposition, she was always trotting about, and turning up where nobody expected her.

Lucy, we need scarcely say, was got up with the greatest care, looking more as if she was going to ride in Rotten Row, or along the esplanade at Brighton, instead of fighting her way across country, unseen, perhaps, by any one.

Mr. Romford, on the other hand, was the sportsman in mufti,

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deer-stalker hat, rough brownish Tweeds, and rusty Napoleons. Thus attired, they set out on their travels, timing themselves so as to reach Tarring Neville towards dusk, in order to have as little of that terrible winter night's entertainment before dinner as possible. And having a good eye for counting, Mr. Romford made a *détour* that not only enabled him to fix his landmarks upon it, but also carried him clear of those troublesome obstacles to some people's progress yclept turnpike-gates. So he reached Tarring Neville just at the time he proposed, and, landing his sister at the front door under the proper reception of the butler and footman, he led Leotard off with his own horse to the stable, in order to see them properly put up for the night before he thought of himself. "Men can ask for what they want, horses can't," was Facey's aphorism; and he always made a point of seeing to his horses himself, a precaution that was more practised by the last generation of sportsmen than by the present one.

No one, to see Mrs. Hazey's reception of Mrs. Somerville, would have imagined for a moment that there had been any objection made to asking her, so fervent and enthusiastic it seemed to be; the only thing that at all damped the ardour of the greeting being the non-appearance of our hero Mr. Romford at her heels. This passing cloud Mrs. Somerville speedily dispelled by saying that her brother had just gone round to the stable, whereupon the glow of enthusiasm was renewed, and the seductive blandishments of the teapot recommended. Mrs. Somerville declined tea, also the alternative of a glass of sherry and a biscuit, observing that she had lunched just before they came away; whereupon the conversation was turned into the weather-groove, from which it naturally ran upon the roads and the state of the country.

Mrs. Hazey was afraid Mrs. Somerville would find the roads very dirty?

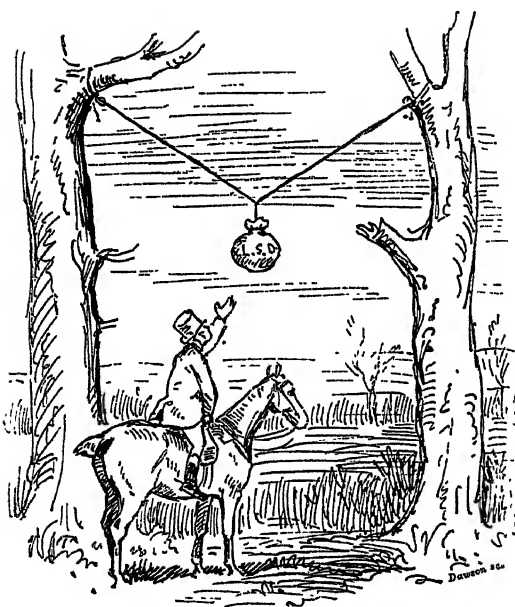
Oh no, she hadn't; they came by the fields. "That splash," said she, looking at one on the side of her habit, "was got coming over Cuckfield Common," and thereupon she held it to the fire to dry.

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Mr. Hazey and Mr. Romford then presently entered the drawing-room, after whom came the boy Bill, who had been loitering in the stable to see whether Facey's horses were quiet to dress or not; and next Miss Anna Maria came sailing in in all the radiance of a recent toilette. Then, after a cast back upon the weather, the roads, and the state of the country, the gentlemen diverged upon the never-failing topic of hunting—each master magnifying his more recent runs, and the ladies discussing the taste and discrimination of milliners, and the probable shape of the approaching spring bonnets and mantles. At length the conversation began to flag, and Mrs. Somerville, whose thoughts had been running for some time on an unpacked box, containing a charming evening dress she had brought for the occasion, gladly adopted Mrs. Hazey's suggestion, that perhaps she would like to see her room, and gathering up her habit becomingly, she followed her hostess up the staircase and along a passage to where a partially-opened door disclosed the gleam of a newly-stirred fire. There, on the sofa, lay the charming evening dress, which ten minutes before had been decorating the elegant person of Dirtiest of the Dirty, who thought she looked uncommonly well in it. Mr. Romford too, having got his candle, was conducted by his obsequious host to the other state apartment, which he presently perfumed with a strong smell of tobacco. He then proceeded to decorate himself for dinner—scarlet coat, white vest, black trousers, such as he wore at Dalberry Lees. And he really looked very civilised. “Devilish handsome,” as he said, when he came to examine himself in the looking-glass.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MR. HAZEY'S HOSPITALITY.



"What a Man has!"

contemptible in his opinion as poverty. Nor birth, nor rank, nor taste, nor talent could compensate for this fatal deficiency. "Poor man—very poor man," he would say, with an air of compassionate pity. Hazey dearly loved to talk about his own money; tell how much he had in railway shares, how much in Turkish scrip, and how much in Danish bonds and new hotels. In travelling, he generally studied his banker's pass-book as a work of light reading for the rail, confidentially

R. HAZEY reversed Dr. Channing's or somebody's recorded opinion that, "not what a man *has*, but what he *is*, should guide us in estimating his true value," for Hazey only looked to what his acquaintance had—we mean in the way of wealth. Hence, any man with plenty of money was sure to be a hero in Hazey's eyes. Nothing so

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revealing to his next neighbour the amount of cash standing to his credit. "Humph!—not a bad balance," he would say, pointing to the figures—£1,490 2s. 8d. or £2,013 17s. 1d.—"not a bad balance for a mere country gentleman to keep;"—Hazey omitting to mention that two-thirds of it were on a deposit receipt bearing three per cent. interest, or as near three per cent. as he could screw out of those who had it.

With feelings such as these we need scarcely say he issued his invitations on the *£ s. d.* principle, baiting his trap as well with the inducement of having the great Mr. Romford as the temptation of meeting the rich widow, Mrs. Somerville. And Hazey having been good enough to report her reputed jointure of two thousand a year, paid quarterly, all the unmarried men in the country had been trimming their whiskers and bucking up their garments in consequence. Brisk widows are always in demand. Still Hazey's house was never in great repute, for his cookery was only indifferent, and his cellar composed of cheap and second-rate wine. So he had to fire off a good many supplementary notes after the first issue; for people, like porpoises, generally come in shoals, or decline coming altogether. Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Large couldn't come. They had a party at home. So they had, but it consisted only of themselves. The fact was, Large wasn't pleased as to Mrs. Large not being taken out first on a former occasion, and had resolved not to go to Tarring Neville any more.

The Rollingers were extremely sorry they couldn't come; Mr. and Mrs. Chipperfield were the same; and young Mr. Anthony Hallpike, who was one of the catches of the country, declined rather unceremoniously, as young gentlemen will do sometimes.

Then the tide of refusal took a turn, and they got some acceptances. Mr. and Mrs. Cropper would have great pleasure in, &c.; Mr. and Mrs. Gowleykins would be most happy; Mr. Hibberbine had the honour; and Mrs. Stirry and Miss Winkler had the same; the Rev. Mr. Matthew Makepiece, the worthy rector of Slavington-cum-Starvington, was also at their command. Then Mr. and Miss Makepiece, who at first were only

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invited to tea, were promoted to the dinner-table. Next there came a little *contretemps* ; for the Pannets of Sycamore Hill, who at first were afraid they would not be able to come, Uncle Joe (from whom they had great expectations) having volunteered a visit, now wrote to say that Joe would put it off ; and this, too, after the Hazeys had invited the Dumbletons to supply their places.

However, it all came right at last ; for the Dumbletons had bad colds, touches of influenza indeed ; and the Pannets were not only better looking, but dressed better ; in addition to which, Pannet was a water-drinker, which Dumbleton was not, indeed far from it, being one of the old sticking head-achey order, who never could be got away from the dinner-table. And Gritty, the cook, was then weighted with a party of sixteen, which might be increased to eighteen or twenty, according or not as the Beddingfields of Woldingham Manor, and Mr. Bonus, who had as yet not answered, came or declined. But Gritty, like all the common cooks, was not easily overpowered. Only give her plenty of rum for the sauces, and she would undertake to get through anything.

Well, Mrs. Hazey, having duly arranged all the sauce and other matters in the morning, and Hazey having told Basket how to deal with the wine, they were free to enact the parts of disengaged host and hostess ; receive their dear Mrs. Somerville and Mr. Romford when they came, then dress themselves diligently, and prepare to greet their equally beloved out-of-door friends when they arrived. Miss, of course, knew nothing of any of these domestic proceedings, and the boy Bill was equally ignorant.

And, as the reader perhaps cares not to follow the elders to their respective apartments, see Mrs. Hazey reject her pink satin for her amber *moire*, or Hazey substitute a pair of candle-light kerseymeres for the bran new " Nicols " that Basket had laid out for his adornment, we will suppose that the worthy pair have at length descended into the drawing-room, where, with a well-swept hearth and a semi-illumination, they patiently await the coming of the company, wondering whether the

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clocks are right, and, if so, how they will be by other people's. Hope nobody will think it necessary to come late—half-past six quite late enough for dinner in winter. Hark! there's the sound of wheels! followed by a lull and a ring and a rush in the passage.

Mr. and Mrs. Gowleykins, of Cock-a-Roost Hall, were the first guests to arrive; fat Gowleykins with a Gibus hat and diminutive tie, Mrs. Gowleykins with a hoop that made her look like "the Great Globe itself." It was with difficulty she could get herself compressed into a seat, and then there was a great balance bagging over the arm. Gowleykins was a big, bald-headed, butter-like man, who straddled and tried to look easy, though feeling extremely uncomfortable, and most heartily wishing himself back at Cock-a-Roost Hall. He was a rich man, having, as Hazey afterwards informed Mr. Romford confidentially, full five thousand a year, which, coupled with a delightful simplicity in horsey matters, made him a most valuable ally to Hazey. He didn't get less than fifty pounds a year out of the laird of Cock-a-Roost Hall—fifty pounds at least, all but the couple of sovereigns or so he gave the groom every Christmas to keep his master's heart soft and emollient.

Mr. and Mrs. Cropper, of Cowleyshaw Hill, Mrs. Stirry, and Miss Winkler followed the Gowleykins, the two former having taken up the latter at their residence at Oaklands Grove, greatly to the prejudice of all three dresses. Cropper had growled the whole way at the unreasonable absurdity of crinolines, devoutly wishing that they and some of their inmates were at Jericho. He, too, was a moneyed man, variously estimated at from two to three thousand a year; and though he didn't hunt, indeed his beer-barrel-like figure almost precluded the idea, yet Hazey managed to squeeze a pony out of him for the Hard and Sharps under the plea of patriotism—aiding the noble sport of hunting, which Hazey always maintained it was the bounden duty of every man to do. Scarcely had Cropper's thick legs carried him round the now assembled circle, and brought him up safely on the hearthrug, than the door opened on the voluntary principle (that is to

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say, without the intervention of servants), and in rolled Mr. Romford in the full array of the Larkspur Hunt—scarlet Tick, clean white vest, black kerseymeres, patent leather boots with elastic sides, for which latter elegancies we do not exactly know to whom he was indebted, but to a firm in St. James's Street.

Then Mr. Hazey, acting the part of bear-leader, made up to Mr. Romford, and, getting him by the arm, forthwith began wheeling and circling him about, introducing him to this person and to that, supplementing his proclamation of names with an aside commentary upon their wealth, such as "Deuced warm fellow that—has his five thousand a year, if he has a halfpenny" (meaning old Cock-a-Roost); or "That's a capital fellow, full of money, subscribes to the hounds, and does everything a man should do." But the great object of Mr. Hazey's admiration was Mr. Bonus, now of Shaverley Place, but formerly of the Stock Exchange, a gentleman who still retained a lively leaning to his old pursuits, being always ready for a deal, in which he generally managed to be successful too. "Wonderful fellow," whispered Hazey to Romford, as, having effected the introduction, he led him off towards the lamp as if to show him the picture of a favourite hunter above—"wonderful fellow, turns everything he touches into gold. Do believe he gets ten-and-a-half per cent. for every halfpenny he has. Is chairman of the Half-Guinea Hat Company, one of the best specs going. Bought a cow of me that our people could make nothing of. Only gave me six-pun-ten for her, and—would you believe it?—she reared him two calves and made him twenty puns' worth of butter besides."

This interesting genius was a slightly-built, middle-sized, yellow-haired man, who might be almost any age from thirty to fifty. The most remarkable feature about him was, a skew-bald fan beard, formed of alternate tufts of yellow and white hair, just like the fringe of a kettle-holder. He was a single man, and a good deal courted in the country.

And now the door opened again, and in pops Mr. Daniel Dennis, the stop-gap of the neighbourhood, a "*rus in urbe*" sort of youth, little remarkable for anything save living opposite a

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weathercock. "I live opposite a weathercock," he was always telling people out hunting. "I live opposite a weathercock, and I saw at a glance this morning that the wind was at north-east;" or, "the weathercock opposite my lodging has been steady at south-west these three days, and I predict we shall soon have rain."

Lucy, who understood stage effect as well as any woman, did not essay to descend until several successive wheel-rolls up to the door and rings of the bell led her to think the company would be about assembled, though she was informed as to who was arriving through the medium of Dirtiest of the Dirty, who had it from Hyacintha, Mrs. Hazey's maid. So she amused herself, during the progress of an elaborate toilette, with listening to the details of the internal economy of Tarring Neville,—who was mean—who was awful mean—who there was no a-bearin',—and in speculating on the probable appearance of Mr. and Mrs. Cropper; what Mr. Bonus would be like; what Mrs. Gowleykins would have on; and whether Mr. Dennis was good-looking or otherwise. At length a passage clock struck the quarter, and after a final glance in the cheval glass, Lucy took up her white-kid gloves and fan, and sailed majestically out of the room, leaving Dirty to rearrange her things and extinguish the six wax-lights with which the apartment was illuminated. "No use in stinting oneself," thought Lucy, as she quitted the blaze of light. She then made the grand descent of the softly-carpeted staircase, and was presently where Basket the butler, glass door-handle in hand, stood guard, as well over it as over a covey of flat candlesticks on the adjoining table.

The door opened, and our magnificent prima donna sailed graciously into the room, radiant with smiles, radiant with inward satisfaction, and dazzling with costly jewels. Her new toilette completely threw in the shade the shabby silks, satins, and velvets of the other ladies. They began to wish they had been a little smarter: Mrs. Cropper, that she had put on her violet; Mrs. Beddingfield, that she had not come in blue. And then they blamed the gentlemen for advising them not.

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Meanwhile, Mrs. Somerville having made a hasty survey of the scene, and satisfied herself that there was no one there to compete with herself, either in the way of looks or attire, dropped her black Spanish lace mantilla off her beautifully rounded shoulder, and proceeded to smirk and smile and show her pearly teeth to the company: "Mrs. Gowleykins, Mrs. Somerville; Mrs. Somerville, Mrs. Beddingfield; Mrs. Cropper, Mrs. Somerville," and so forth.

Masters of hounds are generally pretty punctual, as well at their meets as their meals, and Mrs. Somerville had scarcely concluded her floating teeth-showing gyrations ere Basket sailed noiselessly into the room and announced in a whisper to Hazey, as if imparting a profound secret, that "dinner was ready." Then Hazey, who had got sidled up to Mrs. Somerville, as if he were going to make an attempt on her pocket, offered her his red arm, whereupon the other gentlemen began pairing off with the respective ladies they had had indicated to them as dinner companions: Mrs. Cock-a-Roost with Old Cropper, and Mrs. Cropper with Three Thousand Five Hundred a Year; Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent. with Miss Winkler; Facey ultimately brought up the rear with Mrs. Hazey. By, however, one of those scientific manœuvres known only to great strategical commanders, Anna Maria's capacious dress, like Cassandra Cleopatra's at Dalberry Lees, was found extending itself half over Mr. Romford's chair, and this though her order of going would have indicated her place to be at the other end of the table; but ladies are always very obliging where there is any business to be done.

Grace was then said by the worthy rector of Slavington-cum-Starvington, and forthwith soup began to circulate from each end of the table. Sherry of course followed soup, and then came the fish—a dish of smelts, and turbot with lobster sauce. Hock and Moselle then succeeded, and the gentlemen began to feel a little more comfortable. The ladies of course had dined at luncheon time, and, like Willy Watkins with his hunting, now only ate for conformity. Indeed, we often wonder for whom the great overpowering dinners are provided. If we

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follow a man to his club, and see what he orders, we shall find that soup, fish, and meat, constitute the dinners of nine-tenths of the whole. Tarts, sweets, savouries, are in little demand. But when a party of men sit at one table, instead of at several tables as they do at a club, there seems to be an idea that the accumulation of appetites requires greater appeasing, and makes it necessary to have an infinity of food.

If people find certain dishes at one end of a table, they may be pretty sure what there will be at the other. For instance, a sirloin of beef is pretty sure to be faced by a turkey, whilst a roast leg of mutton generally involves some boiled chickens at the other. Then the ham, tongue, sausages, and so on, follow as a matter of course. Roast beef and turkey was the order of the day at Tarring Neville, for which there was a pretty equal demand; but Facey, not being much of a carver, willingly relinquished the honour of assisting Mrs. Hazey to Mr. Pannet, who sat on the opposite side of the table; thus enabling him to devote his attentions to Miss Hazey. But Facey was prudent and calculating. Anna Maria was certainly very pretty. Fine head and neck, beautiful brown hair, elegant figure; but then there was that confounded "Boy Bill" and another cub or two elsewhere. Besides, Hazey would live for ever, and Mrs. H. looked like a tough 'un, too. Altogether he determined to take the curb of his admiration up a link or two.

Some people seem to think if they get a certain muster of guests together, and place a profusion of food before them, that that constitutes society, and that they may sit staring, just as the master of a union workhouse sits staring at the paupers.

Hazey was one of the silent sort, unless he was talking of buying, or selling, or exchanging; and as he could not hope to interest Mrs. Somerville with a disquisition on horse dealing, or favour her with a sight of his banker's pass book, he began telling her the quality and price of the various things on the table, explaining that the candles were genuine wax, and the oil the finest sperm. He also drew her attention to his crystal, and next told her how he got his linen direct from the manufacturer in Belfast, without subjecting it to the troublesome

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attentions of the middleman. He was a regular bargain hunter, and was so proud of his exploits, that he could not keep his own counsel—even letting out that his champagne was of the cheap order—a most injudicious proceeding, seeing it was sure to deteriorate the flavour. If people do give cheap wine, they should keep the price to themselves.

We will not persecute the reader with a description of all the dishes and delicacies that Gritty's moderate abilities furnished, still less with the hard-featured dessert that followed, the component parts whereof were chiefly apples and pears, nor yet with the burthensome conversation that accompanied the whole. It was just one of those sort of dinners that those who have never seen any better would think good, and those who knew what dinners ought to be would think bad. Friend Facey, however, got through it with much more ease than he did the Dalberry Lees one, and Lucy thought it a great deal better than spending the night with her old mother at Beldon Hall. And she was half sorry when an ominous lull enabled Mrs. Hazey to catch her eye, and with the usual gesticulation moved the adjournment of the ladies; but then she sailed out with the air of an empress.

CHAPTER XL.

HOW TO SPELL CAT.



OF course, on the retirement of the ladies from the dining-room, there was a readjustment of seats at Mr. Hazey's festive board; and our distinguished master, Mr. Romford, between whom and his brother M.F.H. there had been a long interregnum of highly-garnished table, now got together, Mr. Romford occupying the seat of honour just vacated by Mrs. Somerville, having the yellow and white fan-bearded Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent. on his right. Next Ten-and-a-half came old boosy Tom Pennant, then the Rector of Slavington-cum-Starvington, flanked by Daniel Dennis, and opposite sat Joe Beddingfield, Gowleykins, Cropper, and others, all anxious to hear the stories of our master, who looked, indeed, as though he were surcharged with them.

Basket, the butler, with his attendant aide-de-camp, having assisted in the new arrangement by the distribution of chairs, glasses, and the marshalling of decanters, now reduced the illumination by extinguishing the extraneous lamps on the side-board and elsewhere, and presently withdrew, leaving our friends to fraternise through the instrumentality of music, politics, literature, fox-hunting, the fine arts, or what not. Of course, the wine had to circulate once or twice before anything of a conversation could be expected; during which time those who had anything to say for themselves began looking out for a subject, while those who had not, prepared to act the part of sand-bags, by examining and disposing of the wine.

Mr. Bonus—that is to say, Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent.—having

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carefully manipulated his funny fan beard, and found that every hair was right in this very peculiar half-inch fringe, now gave a slight ingratiating turn of his chair towards Mr. Romford; and, after a glance at his hirsute profile, as Romford sat rocking himself in one of Hazey's rickety chairs, apparently thinking of nothing, though in reality scanning every thing and person in the room, Mr. Bonus ventured to ask, in a very deferential tone, if Mr. Romford ever looked into the Derby betting.

"Whiles," replied Facey, pulling out a sample of his beard, and holding it up to the light. "Whiles," repeated he, re-establishing his chair on all fours, and scrutinising Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent. attentively. Derby betting! thought Facey (who could spell Reindeer with any of them). That looked like business; and passing the favourites quickly through his mind, together with the bets he had pending, he was considering what temptation he could afford to offer Mr. Bonus, when his host interfered with his wine. Hazey wanted to talk about his wine; and the prices of wine and the prices which horses are at in the betting ring not harmonising, Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent. was obliged to retire his subject. They, however, mutually booked each other for a venture on a future occasion; Bonus thinking himself better informed than Facey, and Facey having an equally confident opinion of himself. Now let us hearken to our host.

Hazey, who, like Bonus, was a sort of general broker—dabbled in anything—and was always running about at sales in the summer, picking up curious old port, curious old furniture, curious old anything that was cheap, now took his innings with Romford.

Formerly hosts used to persecute about their port, their rich fruity port, their tawny port, their bees'-wingey port, their five in wood and twenty years in bottle port; but since the Chancellor of the Exchequer has opened the flood-gates of the Continent, each connoisseur has his own particular wine that nobody else can acquire. Hazey had several anonymous sorts, each so superior that our party soon resolved itself into a tasting one. The fact was, Mr. Hazey wanted to sell his

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brother master a batch of Burgundy for about double the price he had given for it ; and though Mr. Romford cared very little about wine, having, indeed, an abundant supply of Lord Lovetin's, yet as Hazey was pressing and anxious, he said he didn't care if he took ten or twelve dozen, provided Hazey would deliver it for him at Beldon Hall. And as Hazey could load back with coals from Splutterton Colliery, he agreed to the terms ; and before Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent. could get his own Derby subject renewed, Hazey was at Mr. Romford again with a description of a perfect picture of a horse he had just picked up—far more than up to Hazey's weight—equal to Romford's, in fact—that he wouldn't mind selling, if Romford knew of any one who didn't care for putting his hand pretty deep into his pocket for price. And our master said he knew plenty of people of that sort ; he himself didn't mind what he gave, so long as the animal was really good ; and, altogether, he talked in a very liberal, encouraging sort of way. Emboldened by this, at a later period of the evening, after he had beaten about the bush a little as to their respective countries and covers, Mr. Hazey asked his guest if he would mind giving up Lowfield Banks to him ; whereupon Facey, gathering himself up, replied fiercely, “ No ! would as soon give you an inch off my nose ! ” an assertion that rather startled Mr. Hazey, but still gave him a very favourable impression of Mr. Romford's sporting determination. It was clear he wanted sport. Hazey would have negotiated, at all events, if he had been Mr. Romford ; tried to have got a horse, or a hound, or something to boot. But every man to his mind, thought Hazey.

And now poor Ten-and-a-half, who had been doomed to hear Mr. Hazey monopolising the rich victim, taking advantage of the lull caused by the slight ebullition of temper, turned again to our hero, and in the same bland voice as before, asked him if he ever did anything in the speculative way, Ten-and-a-half having some shares in a certain hotel company that he wouldn't care to be out of, and also a venture in the oil wells of Austria, that were not likely to yield the necessary interest ; but Hazey, quickly recovering from his back-hander, turned again upon our

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distinguished master, with an Italian wine—better, in fact, than the Burgundy; but which, Hazey said, would require a purchaser to dip his hand deeper into his pocket to procure a few dozen of. Facey, however, to whom price was no object, having got a clean glass, after a stare at its colour and an approving smack of his great thick lips, said he wouldn't mind taking ten dozen of it. "Say twelve," replied Hazey, who had booked him the larger quantity of the former. "Twelve be it," yawned Facey, with the utmost indifference.

It was now friend Facey's turn to have his innings; and, after raking either side of the table with his inquisitive little pig-eyes, he folded his hands behind the back of his head, and balancing himself on the hind legs of his chair as before, asked, with a *dégagé* sort of air, "If anybody knew anything of one Mr. Jobbins—Mr. Jonathan Jobbins?"

"Oh, yes, I do," replied Hazey. "Jobbins, of Harefield. Bought the worst horse of him I had ever had in my life—Flash-in-the-Pan; you remember him, Gowleykins?"

"Indeed I do," replied Gowleykins, who had some unpleasant green-pea soup reminiscences of him; said horse having run away with Gowley, and soused him in a horse-pond all over green weed.

"Well, but what about Jobbins?" asked Hazey, anxious to run a fresh scent.

"Oh, nothin' 'ticlar," replied Facey, "only had a letter from him, complaining of moy hounds having killed his cat; and how do you think the ignorant beggar spelt the word 'cat'?" asked Facey, now settling himself down on all fours of his chair. There was a dead silence, each man thinking how it would be.

"I'll bet a guinea none o' you can guess!" exclaimed Facey.

"I'll take your two to one," at length drawled Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent.

"No—even bettin'," said Facey—"even bettin'."

"Come, I'll bet you," said Hazey, who thought he had it.

"Done," replied Romford. "How was it, now?"

"Why, K-a-t," replied Hazey, spelling it.

"Nor, it wasn't!" said Romford, smiling.



"WHY, C-A-T, TO BE SURE," REPLIED FACEY, LAUGHING.

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"I'll bet you now," said Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent., who thought the chances were reduced.

"Done!" replied Romford, coolly adding, "a guinea, mind! —a guinea."

"A guinea," nodded Bonus.

"Well, then, how was it?"

"Why, K-a-double t," replied Bonus.

"Nor, it wasn't," chuckled Facey.

"Double or quits!" now exclaimed Mr. Hazey, thinking he had it at last.

"Done," replied Romford, with the greatest indifference.

"C-a-double t," spelt Hazey.

"Nor, it wasn't," chuckled Romford again.

Mr. Bonus then took a long-drawn inspiration, and, thinking there were but two other ways, viz., K-a-tt-e and C-a-tt-e, made the same double or quits offer.

"Done," said Romford, thinking he might as well exhaust the subject.

"Then K-a-double t-e," spelt Bonus.

"Nor, it wasn't that either," laughed Romford.

"Come, I'll have another turn," cried Hazey, thinking to save something out of the fire.

"An even guinea," said Romford.

"Done," said Hazey. "C-a-double t-e," then spelt Hazey.

"Nor, it wasn't," chuckled Romford again.

"Then how was it?" exclaimed several.

"Why, C-a-t, to be sure," replied Facey, laughing—in which all but the losers joined. They were glum.

"Well, but you said he was an ignorant beggar," observed Bonus.

"Well, he may be an ignorant beggar, and yet know how to spell cat," replied Romford.

"Ah! but you put it as if not knowing how to spell cat constituted his ignorance," rejoined Bonus.

"To be sure!" replied Facey, "that's the way to do it."

A general chuckle then ensued. Very slowly the purses came out, and very reluctantly the sovereigns were counted,

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the chairman of the Half-guinea Hat Company absolutely offering to pay in pounds, an indignity that Mr. Romford could not brook.

"Out with the shillins!" said he, and the shillings he got. Having tried all the coin on his plate, he deliberately put them into his waistcoat pocket, saying, "it would do very well to pay 'pikes with," and again established himself on the hind-legs of his chair as before. He thought he had done a very good night's work.

Then as the circulation of the bottle became weaker and more languid, and men began to twist, and turn, and writhe about in their chairs, all indicative of present satiety, Basket, the butler, at length put an end to the negotiations and commercial transactions of the evening by appearing with a loftily borne coffee-tray, whose jingling cups clattering around acted the part of the bell that rings the merchants out of the Royal Exchange in the City of London. Up rose the majority of the guests, some to the coffee, some to the water, some to the sherry, some to the fingering and adjustment of their collars, their variously-shaped beards, and shirt-fronts. And all being apparently ready for a move, Mr. Hazey duly dissolved the meeting by making for the door, and saying, "then, shall we join the ladies?"

"With all my heart," replied Romford, chucking his napkin ostentatiously on to the middle of the table, as if to let people see he was not going to pocket it, when, without any bowings, after you-ings, or any nonsense of that sort, he just stalked boldly out of the room. The rest then followed as they liked.

The drawing-room had now received a great accession of light, and if Mrs. Hazey's opinion of the importance of her guests might be inferred from the number of candles she was burning in their honour, it must have been very great. Independently of the heavy ordnance—the cut-glass chandelier—there was scarcely a bracket or holder of any sort without its burner. If Hazey hadn't sold the twenty-four dozen of wine, he would have grudged the expense amazingly. As it was, after counting the guests, he began calculating how much

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the light would cost per head ; and this, too, while he was pretending to keep up a running commentary with Mr. Beddingfield about his damaged barley. But here we are in the radiant apartment, and must devote ourselves to the ladies.

About the centre of the lady-circle, under a perfect blaze of light, reclining gracefully on a luxurious yellow and gold ottoman, with her beautiful foot resting on an elaborately worked floss-silk cushion, sat our Jermyn Street friend, looking as though she had been nursed in the lap of luxury, and had never known anything of debts, or duns, or difficulties, now giving herself up to the enjoyment of the hour without the slightest care for the future. She was about tired of the ladies ; indeed, she often said that the only thing that reconciled her to being a woman was, that she could not by any possibility have to marry one ; so she slightly raised her person, and contracted her dress, as if to indicate that any gentleman might come and talk to her who liked. And Mr. Hazey, as in duty bound, was presently by her side, now asking after her horse, now after the hounds ; and now, as Mrs. Hazey, in her company exertions, got out of hearing, expatiating on the elegance of the jewellery that encircled her swan-like neck and beautiful arms.

The chairman of the Half-guinea Hat Company, though somewhat chagrined at his loss in the dining-room, hovered round, greatly taken with her appearance—thinking to captivate her with his yellow and white beard, through which he had quietly run the pocket-comb in the passage.

Next Mr. Facey Romford's great scarlet shoulders were seen converging upon the piano, and then Miss Anna Maria's beautiful white ones were seen descending towards the music stool, while Mr. Romford stood over as if to let the fair one try to excel the dulcet notes of the lisping syren at Dalberry Lees. And if Mr. Facey could be won by a girl with such a " beastly brother Sam " as the boy Bill, it is but due to Miss Hazey's charms to say, that she would have accomplished the victory, for he thought of her well that night, and awoke still thinking of her the next morning. She quite sung herself into his good

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graces, thus indeed showing, that "music hath charms to soothe the savage breast." How he wished he had brought his flute—would have given a guinea to have brought his flute—would never go from home again without his flute—would like to have "stonished these beggars with his proficiency."

And the ladies, with that fine delicate perception of business that they all possess, now began to withdraw themselves and their cohorts quietly, so that when Miss Hazey arose and turned round for laudations after her third song, she found the room greatly thinned. Then Mrs. Makepiece, who owed Mrs. Hazey one for her assistance in capturing young Mr. Busswell for her Sophia Jane, came gallantly forward, and seizing Miss Hazey by both hands, thanked her most fervently for her beautiful music, and begged she would favour them with one more song—just *one* more—before she (Mrs. Makepiece) went. Whereupon, after a little pressing, and a "come, you may as well do it," from Mr. Romford, Miss turned again to the instrument, and our Master mounted guard as before. Mrs. Makepiece watching and inwardly calculating that Miss would very soon be Mrs. Romford, and Miss preferring to humour Mr. Romford's *encore* to limiting herself to the one song that Mrs. Makepiece had prayed, that lady, and her plain but very amiable daughter, presently withdrew, noiselessly, leaving the chaunts in full swing; and when Miss Hazey again arose for commendation, she found the men clustered round the sherry and soda-water tray, Mrs. Pannet watching to see that Mr. Pannet didn't take equal parts of whiskey and water for his nightcap. Then Anna Maria, as she drew on her new white kid gloves, gave Mr. Romford such a loving look, when in reply to his request for another song, she said "not to-night, please," adding—*sotto voce*—"another time," as quite captivated the Facey heart, and made Mrs. Somerville (who, too, was on the watch) almost wish she hadn't come. Cassandra Cleopatra was extinguished for that night at least, thus showing that ladies are not always wrong in hoping against hope—in never giving up a man short of the church door.

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And the last Rose of Summer—to wit, poor Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent.—having at length taken his departure, there was a general winding-up of watches, fearing it was late, and talking of breakfasts the next morning, Hazey being now anxious to get all parties away to bed, seeing that the extensive illumination they were then indulging in could not be kept up at less than twelve or fourteen shillings an hour. So Mr. Hazey, after two or three ineffectual movements, at length observed, that perhaps Mrs. Somerville would like to go to bed, to which our fair friend assenting, as indeed she could not well do otherwise, there was a brisk lighting of candles, and good-nighting, and our fair tragedy queen sailed off under convoy of Mrs. Hazey, arriving in her bedroom just as Miss Dirty finished her tour of the bedrooms, helping herself to a light blue smelling-bottle from Anna Maria's toilette table, an emerald ring from Mamma's, and a pair of shirt sleeve links from the boy Bill's.

She then helped her mistress to undress and get into bed, retailing to her all the gossip and history of the lower regions of the house as she proceeded. And as one state bedroom is very much like another state bedroom, and one night passed in a country-house is very much like another, in the interests of the chase we will leave the Tarring Neville one to the imagination of the reader, and proceed to describe Mr. Romford's day with the Hard and Sharp hounds.

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CHAPTER XLI.

THE HARD AND SHARP HOUNDS.



"Hounds, Horses, and All!"

R. HAZEY being, as we said before, duly impressed with Mr. Romford's importance, not only as a sportsman but a man of great social position, had marshalled his forces with an eye to general effect. Jawkins the huntsman, and Peter the whip, commonly called Peter Simple, were charged to put on clean ties and polish their boots to the utmost extremity, while Silkey the groom was cajoled into doing his best with the horses by the promise

of an excursion to Kittlefield fair on the Monday. The hounds, too, were most carefully drawn—drawn as well with an eye to pace and endurance as to the more obvious qualities of colour and size. There is no master of hounds, however insignificant, who does not think he can astonish his friends with his powers, or with something about his establishment.

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Jawkins was well named, for he was a bustling, noisy, shallow, show-off little fellow, continually holloaing and blowing his horn. As he never went to see any other pack of hounds but his own, he was perfectly satisfied with the Hard and Sharps, and had no doubt Facey would be equally pleased with them. If he, Facey, wasn't, he'd be no great judge, Jawkins thought. He was a good hand at puffing and selling hounds, and was in fact the Silkey of the kennel. Peter's nickname of Simple describes him. He was a silly fellow, a man that might be made to do almost anything.

What with Jawkins in a fuss and Peter in a flurry, a fox had an uncommonly good chance of escape. Peter had passed from place to place with great rapidity, sometimes getting through half a season, sometimes through a whole one, but never through two, till he came to friend Hazey. Still Peter was a smartish young fellow, and, like the gentleman who sat a horse with firmness, ease, and grace until the horse began to move, Peter's deficiencies were not apparent until the hounds began to hunt. Hazey, however, had him at his own price, and Peter was not only willing to make himself generally useful during the week, but also to go, too, for the letters and papers on a Sunday.

But here they come—hounds, horses, and all; Jawkins on Catch-'em-alive-O; Peter on Robin Adair, with Silkey riding Valentine for his much respected master. They trot gaily over the greensward, pass down the dip in the park to the well, and, making a bold sweep round the now leafless birches, come smartly up to the front with the air of the Inns of Court Volunteers. Here they halt for admiration; and now the inmates of the house, having duly satisfied nature, rise from the *débris* of breakfast and make for the windows, while the butler and footman come into the room to re-arrange matters for any chance comers. Mrs. Hazey and Anna Maria alone maintain their positions at the table—Mrs. still presiding at the handsome melon-patterned tea service, while Miss takes charge of the coffee.

And now the door bell begins to twitch and tingle and ring,

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according to the status and nerves of the party pulling the brass knob—Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent. making the house resound with his summons, while little Mr. Sheepshanks scarcely makes himself heard. In the guests come straddling and clanking their spurs, and frizzing up their side hair, all thinking themselves uncommonly killing. Then, after bobs and bows and shakes of the hand are exchanged with Mrs. Hazey and Miss, the new comers apply themselves vigorously to the viands, and the process of deglutition is again in full force. And the cry is still, They come, they come! till Gritty the cook almost begins to fear for a famine. But as the kitchen-maid butters her last batch of hot rolls there is a sudden lull, neither entrance nor breakfast-room bell resound. The run is over, and Gritty retires to the cupboard to recruit with a glass of "Matchless Old Tom Gin."

And now, after certain mysterious looks and nudges, something is said about the "weed," and forthwith the return match of hand-shaking and grinning is played, and after a scramble for hats, caps, and whips in the passage, a certain sound then indicates and a scratching noise announces fire, and, the front door being hurriedly opened, a group of aspiring youths rush out and range themselves under the Italian-columned portico of the house for an inaugural smoke. Here they are presently joined by others, who have also beat a retreat, until the steps are as crowded as those of the "Rag" on a Derby night. And they whiff and puff and smoke and blow a great variety of curiously-shaped clouds. At length the pent-up torrent of humanity is burst by Mr. Hazey appearing with his distinguished guest, Mrs. Somerville, on his arm, followed by Romford with rather a formidable looking whip under his. The crowd then start and distribute themselves, some going up to the garden, some along the holly walk, others going down to stare the hounds out of countenance. And Facey, thinking to see their performance in the field, follows smoking suit, with his old briar-root pipe, and wanders away to the stables. Hazey then lionises Lucy: shows her his ducks, points out Spiceington spire on the hill, and Lord

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Dundreary's seat in the distance. Meanwhile the equestrian plot thickens. The heavy subscribers, men entitled to be late, come cantering up, whom Hazey greets with a fervour apportioned to the price and punctuality of their payments. And now an exclamation is heard of—

“There! there's my boy Bill!” from Hazey, pointing out his son turning on to the lawn on a good-looking grey—
“There! there's my boy Bill! Show me the man who turns his son out better than I turn out my boy Bill!” Then, taking young Mr. Heslop aside, he whispered in his ear, “That's a horse that would suit you now—safest, most temperate animal I ever was on; and *cheap*, too,” added he, in a still lower key, with a squeeze of Heslop's arm.

“Well, but what do you call cheap?” asked Heslop, who knew that it was a term of various interpretation.

“Well,” said Hazey, scrutinising his victim attentively—
“well, I'll tell you in two words—I'll tell you in two words—but first let me say that it's no use offering me less than I ask. I want eighty guineas for him, and I won't even take punds.”

Hazey had given eight-and-twenty for him about three weeks before, and had spent an hour in vainly endeavouring to get the seller to give him a sovereign back.

“Hem,” mused Mr. Heslop, who wanted a horse for about the price Hazey had given. “Hem, I'll see how he goes.”

“Do,” rejoined Hazey, and he took an early opportunity of telling his boy Bill to keep near Mr. Heslop, and show off his horse to the best advantage, keeping clear of water, of which the beast was rather shy.

But here comes Lucy on Leotard, accompanied by brother Romford on that magnificent good-for-nothing weight-carrier Everlasting, closely followed by the curious yellow and white fan-bearded gentleman, Mr. Bonus, *alias* Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent., on a very inferior looking shrimp of an animal. Ten-and-a-half is much struck with Lucy, and does not think the less of her for having two thousand a year. Would make it into four, if he had her, in no time. He doesn't know whether

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Mrs. Somerville looks best in a morning or an evening costume. The habit is very becoming to her, but then how elegant looking she was in full dress overnight. There were plenty of other gentlemen equally enamoured, but Facey kept a watchful eye on the whole, looking as if he was ready either to kick or strike.

Hazey, on his part, is much struck with Everlasting's magnificent appearance; above all with his fine arch neck, telling how lightly he would play with the bit and bend to the bridle. Hazey had noticed the gag in the Baker's mouth on the bag fox day, and guessed what his peculiarity was. Here, however, there seemed to be no mistake; light free action, undeniable shape, fine shoulders, beautiful head, full of intelligence—together as fine an animal as ever he set eyes on. And Hazey felt flattered at Mr. Romford bringing such a horse into his hunt—evidently one of his best—and showing that he thought the Hard and Sharp hounds required some catching.

And now, time being up, and a quarter of an hour's law being given to boot—for Hazey was always in a greater hurry to leave off than he was to begin—all parties having at length got together, the cavalcade moved off in a cluster, hounds first, Hazey next, supported on either side by Lucy and Facey. Great were the hopes of the Hard and Sharpites that they would astonish our Master. If they only had a chance, they thought, they could not fail to do so. Mr. Romford's might be good hounds, but theirs, they were quite sure, were better. In fact, nothing could be better than theirs. Then they criticised and made their commentaries on Lucy. Deuced handsome woman she was—best turned-out woman they had ever seen. Most perfect model of a lady's horse she was on. Then there were inquiries as to whether she rode, so that they might not be cut down by her. But this question could not be answered. Bonus, however, believed so.

Hazey, in a general way, was never in a great hurry about finding, preferring one run a day to two, as indeed did most of his field; but on this occasion he stretched a point, and

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stopped a greater extent of country than usual, right up to Hawkworth Hills indeed. So, after making two or three insignificant places safe, as he called it, he gave the word for Rockwoodside, and forthwith the bump of earnestness began to develop itself in the increased bobbing of the caps and the extra working of the elbows and legs of Jawkins and Co. in advance with the hounds. Then the field got their horses short by the head, the steady old hunters bobbing on at their ease, the fractious ones pulling and fretting in a very disagreeable way to their riders.

So the gay cavalcade passed along Narrow Lane, round Grindstone Quarry Hill, and through the Scotch fir clump at Cornbrook, to avoid the great staring toll-bar at Latchford Law. Hazey never disturbed a 'pikeman if he could help it.

Fortune generally favours a master of hounds anxious to show sport. She is more considerate to them than she is to the "racing gents," who are frequently drenched with rain and other unpleasantnesses. Not that rain can do fox-hunters any harm; but fortune is generally propitious to them in other things—good fox, good scent, good country, good find, good finish; all the "goods" the gods can provide, in fact. The sport is generally either very good or very bad.

And now the subsiding caps in front denote the approach to the cover, and the words, "Here we are!" presently passes along the line. Jawkins next pulls up, and Peter Simple presents a broadside to the field, to keep them off the valuable hounds. "War horse, Rachel!" cries he, taking a left-handed cut at the delinquent. "Have a care there, Prosperous!" hitting him, as he had missed the other.

The cover was a beautifully retired one—just the sort of place in which a peace-loving fox might be expected to dwell, being an angular five-acre wood, lying in a dell at the junction of three grassy hills. Whichever way a fox broke, he was sure to be viewed by the whole of the field—a great encouragement to those who, perchance, might not see him at any other time.

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And now being all ready for the fray, Lucy, Facey, field, and all, Mr. Hazey gives a nod to Jawkins, who gives another to his hounds, and away they dash into cover, as if each one knew the whereabouts of the fox and meant to have him by the neck in no time. Hazey's hounds were always very keen at the beginning, but their ardour very soon cooled.

"*Yoicks, wind him!*" cheers Jawkins, as much to show he is huntsman as anything else, while Peter Simple cuts away to a corner up which Reynard sometimes slips unperceived. And scarcely has Peter got there ere a very cool, collected, ruddy-coated gentleman, head in air, with brush extended, comes trotting up the ride below, looking as if he didn't exactly know whether the noise he heard proceeded from the hounds or from some hawbuck exercising his lungs. But the sight of Simple's sapient countenance satisfying Reynard on that point, he gave his well-tagged brush a sort of defiant whisk in the air, as much as to say, "Now, old stupid, what are you staring at? Why ain't you lookin' arter the cows?"

"*Talli-ho!*" now screams the excited Simple, in a way that would infallibly have headed a pusillanimous fox, but this gentleman being one of the flying sort, and having, moreover, no great opinion of Jawkins's abilities, merely increases his speed, and, passing up the gorge between the hills, makes his way into the open. "Gone away! gone away!" screamed the half-frantic Peter, and then what screams, and whoops, and yells, and shrieks resound from the far end of the cover, how the pullers begin to get the bits in their mouths, and the funklers to look out for their leaders. "Which way! which way!" is the cry. "Where's Smith? where's Snooks? where's Noakes? where's Tomkins?"

Meanwhile the hounds, having got a capital start, shot well ahead, making the possibility of being overridden or even pressed upon quite extinct, for the scent is first-rate, and the country most favourable. So they race, and fling, and press, and snatch the scent as if one had as good a right to it as another. It was just the sort of day to make a third-rate pack look like a first-rate one. Hazey saw that, and so did Facey,

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though cunning Hazey pretended to deprecate the scent, holloaing to the hounds to get "for'ard," as if they were not doing their best as it was.

Mr. Facey Romford, who thought to do the grand and consequential—the General McMurdo of the review—found it necessary to put along rather faster than he expected, so getting his horse firmly by the head, he established himself in his seat, and hustled along as if he was out with his own pack. Lucy, too, scuttled along, closely followed by Hazey, the latter now looking alternately at her and her horse. He thought he never saw a neater couple. And though he had no intention of unduly risking his neck—seeing he kept Jawkins to do the dangerous—still he followed in her wake, not liking, in the first place, to be beaten by a lady, and thinking, in the second place, to see how she and her horse performed. He was all for appraising an animal, whether it was for sale or not. It kept his hand in. Besides, there is no saying what may happen. But the pace was too good for much observation; indeed, when our prudent master came to the third fence—a rough boundary hedge, with the usual briary entanglements, over which Mrs. Somerville hopped without disturbing a twig—he began to wish he had not committed himself to the speculation of following her. What matter did it make to him how she rode. Confound the ugly place, he should like to turn away. "Come up!" exclaimed he to his horse, in the sort of half-resolute way that indicated a shirk, and Valentine, taking him at his intention, swerved to the left, while Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent. took it in his stride. Hazey then seeing old Mr. Gallinger going as if for a gate, followed suit, and was presently enjoying the perspective of more gates in the distance, with the majority of the field cramming away on his right.

Up and down, up and down they went—now a coat, now a cap, now Mrs. Somerville's hat and habit. The hounds were a long way ahead, pressing up the gently rising ground of Cowslip Grange, then through the fir plantations of Fawley, without dwelling a moment, and onwards, still pointing due north up

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the sloping side of Bullersgreen, and over the brook at Ravensdowne stone-pits. Here a most acceptable check ensued, for Everlasting had been gently intimating to Romford that the rising ground did not agree with him, and Facey did not wish the information to go any further. So he turned his horse's head to the air, and sat motionless, thankful that Jawkins had to make the cast and not him. Everlasting had taken his fences very well, and being a horse of enormous stride had kept Romford in a becoming place. Leotard, too, had gone well, and had left old Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent. immeasurably in the lurch. The roadsters, and shirkers, and craners now seeing a pause, pushed on in hopes of getting another chance of being again left behind.

Jawkins, nothing daunted by having the eyes of England upon him, now lays hold of his hounds, and, assisted by Peter Simple, proceeds to make a cast that he thinks will greatly edify Mr. Romford—give him something to talk about when he gets back into Doubleimupshire. And as fortune sometimes favours even the foolish, and there is no very impeding fence in the way to make Jawkins think the fox has taken an easier line, he presently hits him off at a cattle gap, and away the hounds go with a screech.

“Beautiful! beautiful!” ejaculates Hazey, adding, “I hope Mr. Romford saw that.”

Then they all fell into place, Hazey leading (so long as there is no leaping), Facey and Lucy a little to his right, with the boy Bill on the eighty-guinea grey behind them. Bill has handled the horse so neatly and well, that Heslop is half inclined to bid sixty for him. And now they are all at it as before, jumping and spurting and shirking—red coats and green coats and black coats; white boots, hot boots, brown boots, and black boots. The line is more favourable to the grand horse Everlasting, being slightly on the slope, and Facey puts him along without fear of a failure. It was only up the steep that he showed his infirmity, and degenerated into a shut-up. But Facey did not keep horses to look at; and if they could not go with the hounds, they could go back to the place from

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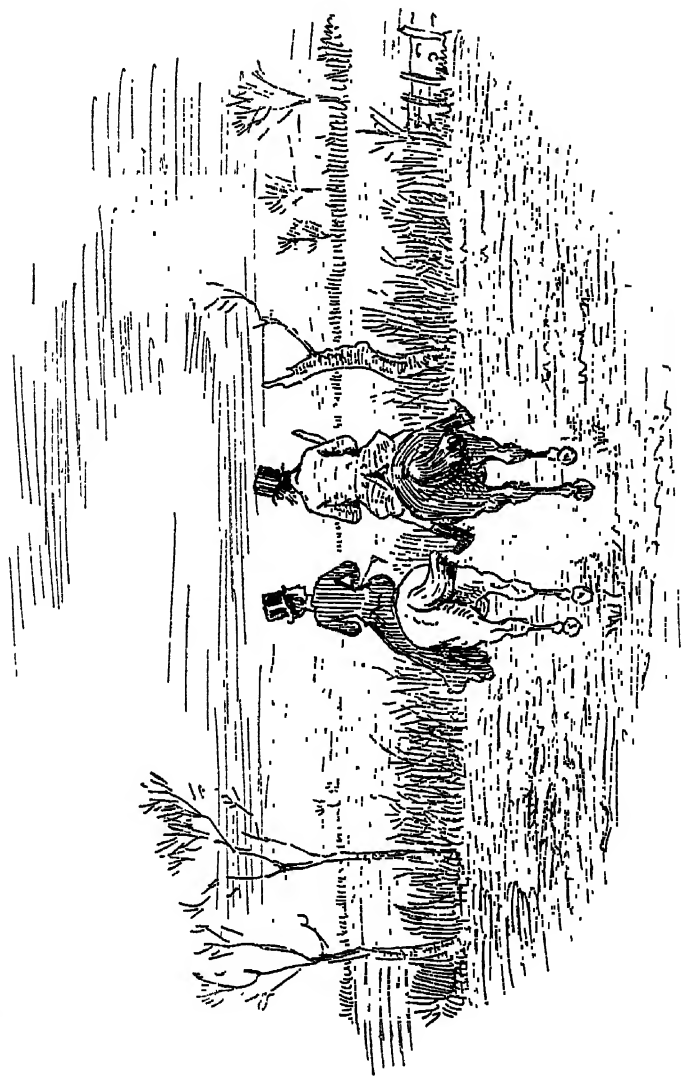
whence they came. So he just stuck his spurs into Never-lasting, as he called the horse, and sent him along in the independent sort of way of a huntsman who is not hunting the hounds—acting the gentleman, as poor Sir Richard Sutton used to say on those occasions. Meanwhile Jawkins, who is greatly pleased with his own performances, cheers and hurries on his hounds, hoping the lady will tip him a sovereign if he gets her the brush. “Dash it! what a grand thing it would be if she gave him a sovereign,” thought he, holloaing the hounds on. He would buy Mrs. J. a twelve-and-ninepenny bonnet that should quite cut out Mrs. Silkey’s. “*For-rard on! for-rard on! hounds,*” cries he to the racing pack. “What business had Mrs. Silkey to give herself the hairs she did? A huntsman’s wife was far afore a grum’s in point o’ greatness. Hark to Columbine! hark! *that’s the way on ’im!*” shouted he, as Mercury now pushed to the front. “A grum was a mere under-strapper to a huntsman—had to bring him his ’oss, and take away his ’oss, and clean him his ’oss, and clip him his ’oss, if he required to have him clipped. Silkey be singed! Mrs. S. too—Hupstart ’ussy!”

And now, what with pressing and cheering, and thinking of the bonnet, aided by stain of a flock of sheep on a piece of very water-logged land, Jawkins managed to get his hounds right beyond the scent, and the flush of the former successful cast onwards being still full upon him, he holds them on till they are quite clear of the line. The fox has turned short to the left to avoid a conference with the driver of a coming coal-cart. “*On, on, on!*” however, cheered Jawkins, waving them forward with his arm, still thinking of the bonnet, the hairs, and the consequence. “Who the deuce was a grum’s wife?” muttered he.

“Hold hard!” now cries Mr. Hazey, holding up his hand, seeing the fast-expiring energies of the pack. “Hold hard!” repeats he, fearing for the finish.

“‘Old hard!” shouts Bill, who has been nursing the grey along very judiciously. And hold hard it is generally.

Meanwhile Mr. Romford, who is very long-sighted, has



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viewed the fox stealing quietly along among the straggling gorse bushes on the rising ground some distance to the left; but it being no part of his duty to assist the operations of a rival pack, nor yet to test the enduring qualities of the grand horse Everlasting, he keeps his own counsel, and lets Jawkins persist in his mistaken cast forward, which ends, as Facey foresaw, in hopeless and unbroken silence. Jawkins then gives them a wide swing to the right, and ultimately by a back cast crosses the line of the fox at the base of the hill along which Mr. Facey had viewed him. Then great was the applause of the admiring field at the skill of the huntsman, and the stanchness of the pack. "Best hounds in England," they said. And they all got their horses by the head in anticipation of a stinger. But the goddess Diana said "no." Moreover she whispered to Hazey, "You call the four miles you have come, seven, and let Mr. Romford and his sister depart in peace. They'll run you down, whatever you do, so you may just as well close as you are." And in pursuance of that decree, the scent became weaker and more languid. Indeed, only two or three of the old stagers could hold it at all, the rest of the pack being obliged to take it on trust.

And though Jawkins cheered them, as if his noise would assist their endeavours, yet it was obvious to every one that unless the fox despised them sufficiently to await their coming up, they would never overtake him. Mr. Romford and sister Somerville, therefore, dropped their reins on their horses' necks preparatory to a stop. Our Master had taken his bearings from "Ten-and-a-half," and found he was going from home instead of towards it. Had the fox been travelling "t'other way," there is no saying but Facey might have holloaed them on to him, even though they were driving him into his country, where he might find him another day. Here, however, there was no inducement to stay, Facey having, as he said, appraised the establishment to ninepence, and wouldn't know them better if he stayed there a month.

So Lucy and he quietly withdrew to the rear of the field, and as Hazey now pressed on to contribute his quota of science

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to the huntsman, telling him which way he thought the fox was gone, they availed themselves of an intervening plantation to retire altogether, mutually agreeing they had had enough of old Hazey and the Hard and Sharp Hounds.

They then struck across country in search of their way home.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE FAT BOY OF PICKERING NOOK



HE news of Mr. Romford's expedition to Tarring Neville soon reached Dalberry Lees, and caused a profound sensation in that quarter. Both Mrs. Watkins and Miss looked upon it with grave suspicion, for though they did not admit Miss Hazey's beauty—indeed, thought at times she was rather plain—yet they both confessed her dangerous powers of coquetry, and dreaded lest she might have ensnared the innocent Mr. Romford in her wiles. If Mrs. Watkins had only known he had been going, she would have given him a hint as to Miss Anna Maria's propensities—she was a regular flirt, and nothing else.

Now the only thing they could do was to endeavour to eradicate the mischief. Doubtless Mr. Hazey's hounds had been a source of great attraction; but, then, they could not hope to get Mr. Watkins to set up a pack to counteract the impression they might have made. It was a pity that fox-hunters hung so together. And then the recollection of the non-arrival of the bag-fox occurred, and Mrs. Watkins wished that might not have something to do with it—if so, Mr. Carstangs had a great deal to answer for. However, the Watkinses had the advantage of propinquity; and, rich as Mr. Romford was, he might not be insensible to the advantages of an heiress—one, too, without any brothers, who were always great bores. And Mrs. Watkins considered long and anxiously how to reinstate themselves in the sporting graces

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of the great master of Beldon Hall. At length she hit upon an idea, which, if not quite orthodox, was, at all events, well calculated to mislead a lady. And, for the purpose of fully explaining matters, we must here indulge in a little geography.

If the reader will take a map of England—a Bradshaw, for instance—and cast his eye up to where Doubleimupshire shoulders Snoremboremshire in friendly familiarity, he will perceive a confluence of railways converging upon a dot denoting the once elegant and retired little town of Pickering Nook.

Before the introduction of steam Pickering Nook was one of the quietest little places in the kingdom: one doctor, no lawyer, two milliners, and an occasional pedler with the latest London fashions. The inhabitants were chiefly elderly ladies and people who loved retirement and the musical note of the nightingale. Now it is hiss, screech, whistle—hiss, screech, whistle—morning, noon, and night. Five railways run right into the very heart of the little town, severing it like a star-fish. It has become a perfect ant-hill of industrious locomotion. People seem to go to Pickering Nook in order to pass to every other place.

Nook! Nook! Nook! Who doesn't know the familiar cry? Pickering Nook is only its name upon paper. It is never called anything but Nook by the porters.

When the first bisecting line cut right through the town, severing old Mr. Mellowfield's garden, it was said that the place was ruined for ever; no one could live there after.

Mr. Mellowfield, who had retired from the troubles of fish-curing to enjoy his filberts and Madeira in the evening of life, was so shocked at the invasion of his privacy, that he nearly choked himself with anger as he waddled about with a plan of the premises, detailing his grievance to everybody that would listen to him: and nothing but a strong application of golden ointment could have got over the difficulty. Ten thousand pounds for two thousand pounds' worth of property mollified him.

The next line of railway had fewer opponents; the third one, less; and so on in a diminishing ratio. But the extraordinary

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part of the thing was, that what at first was looked upon as an intolerable nuisance by the natives, was presently regarded as an absolute advantage by a stranger, an affluent young gentleman, much troubled with obesity, which none of the ordinary remedies could reduce. In vain he tried walking, and riding, and rowing, and swimming, and cricketing, and Turkish bathing—he never could get himself below eighteen stone and a half. Fox-hunting he didn't like, because of the wait and uncertainty; hare-hunting had the same objection—he got chilled between the heats, and, moreover, disliked the monotony of road riding. Starving was very much at variance with his inclination, and even by living upon fish, or biscuits and grapes, he seldom got more than half a stone off his weight—nothing to a man who had turned twenty. He didn't like it: he was afraid he should get too fat. Not that he was too fat then, but he was afraid of becoming so. It is a comfortable circumstance that people never do fancy themselves too fat; they are sometimes afraid of becoming too fat, but they are never too fat at the time—just the right size, in fact; only hope they will be able to keep as they are.

This stranger was young Mr. Stotfold, of—we don't exactly know where—a gentleman who was commonly called Squeakey Stotfold, from his having a most disproportionate voice to his body. It was more like the shrill note of our friend Punch, when plying for patronage, than the natural voice of a human being; and the sound of it always made people start and turn round, short round, to see what was coming. Well, young Stotfold being very fond of his food, was afraid that he might ultimately get too fat; and at length his medical adviser, Mr. Slopperton, hit upon a plan that should procure him the exercise of hunting without its drawbacks and disadvantages. He proposed that his patient should set up a pack of stag-hounds, and hunt from railway stations: nothing to do but load and enlarge his stag wherever he liked. No asking leave, no paying damage, no propitiating farmers, no preparation—no nothing, but just do what he liked. If one place got too hot to hold him, he had nothing to do but pack up his traps

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and away to another. And, glancing at the map—as we requested the reader to do—the convergence of lines upon Pickering Nook pointed it out as one of the most eligible spots for that sort of pursuit in the kingdom. From it Mr. Stotfold could shoot out north, south, east, and west—up into Snorem-boremshire, down into Doubleimupshire, out on either side, with plenty of stations, and a great variety of country. Nothing to do but look at his Bradshaw. Hunt at any hour of the day; express train, mixed train, slow train, goods train—they were going at all times of the day. And old Mr. Mellowfield's house, close to the station, being vacant, Mr. Stotfold installed himself in it, with a most miscellaneous kennel of hounds, and some of the strongest, roughest-going horses in the kingdom. There was nothing too rough-actioned for Stotfold to ride; the more he bumped, the more exercise he got, the more he could eat—and eating was the object, not hunting; he hunted to eat, in fact.

Many travellers, we dare say, have seen our friend lounging about the station at Pickering Nook, or smoking his cigar on the triumphal arch that connects the up lines with the down, looking as though he were lord of all he surveyed, and as if everybody who saw him must admire him. He dressed in the brightest, gaudiest colours: pea-green coat, with canary-coloured vest, sensation ties, Garibaldi shirts, leathers and tops. He was always attracting attention by ventriloquising the guards and railway porters, as it were, with his extraordinary voice. All his non-hunting days were spent at the station, in chaffing the attendants, and flirting with the pretty girls in the refreshment rooms.

At the time of our story he was just turned five-and-twenty, though he did not look so much, having a fine, light, cauliflower-like head of hair, shading a plump, blue-eyed, pink-and-white, round face, that would have looked more at home under a bonnet than a hat. Whiskers he had none, and very apocryphal moustache, with which, however, he took considerable pains—frequently feeling if it was all there, and trying to coax it into a ram's-horn-like curl at the corners.

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He had been at the "Nook" since the beginning of the season, hunting and trespassing wherever he liked—procuring himself a certain amount of ill-will from the farmers and people, more on account of the unmannerly conduct of some of his stags than the mere hunting proceeding. One stag in particular, called the Benicia Boy, had been very unruly, having upset a clothes-basketful of children out airing in Reislip Green Road, knocked an old milkman over with his cans, and starred the lofty mirror in Mrs. Sarcenet's millinery shop in Shelvington with his great unprincipled head. Still, a stag-hunt being a novelty, many people asked the fat boy to their places; while the fact of his being a bachelor did not lessen his attractions.

With a lady like Mrs. Watkins, who knew no better than proclaim that her husband only hunted for conformity, and who thought to ingratiate herself with such a sportsman as our hero by sending for a bag-fox from town, it may readily be supposed that the fat boy's establishment would be very deceptive; and it now occurred to her anxious mind, that if she could get Mr. Stotfold to come to Dalberry Lees with his stag-hounds they would not only retrieve the former disappointment, but also ingratiate themselves very considerably with Mr. Romford. She thought a stag-hunt would be the very thing to tempt him with; make such a nice change from the fox-hounds; and the more she thought of it, the better she liked it. And, without consulting friend Willy, she determined to carry out the idea.

Migratory masters not being very ceremonious, though none of them had even seen the fat boy, yet Cassandra Cleopatra "Dear Sir'd" him on behalf of her father, inviting him to dine and stay all night at Dalberry Lees, and turn the stag out on the lawn the next day.

The invitation came opportunely, for somehow Squeakey, who was not often asked twice to the same place, was beginning to feel the want of society other than the Nook afforded, and he gladly instructed Tomkins, the station master—to whom (not being a good speller himself) he gave £5 for conducting

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his correspondence—to accept the invitation on behalf of himself, his stag, and his hounds.

And, having thus laid the foundation of another “uproar,” Miss Cassandra was presently at her desk again, on behalf of mamma, inviting her “Dear Mr. Romford” to come to meet a brother master of hounds, saying it wasn’t Mr. Hazey, but not telling him who it was. And Romford, albeit very wary, and not at all anxious to meet any of the masters of hounds whose kennels he had laid under contribution for hounds, considered, on reflection, that none of them would be likely to visit such a muff as old Willy; and Anna Maria’s charms having now somewhat paled before the effulgent light of Cassandra Cleopatra’s ducats, he, too, accepted the invitation, and so made the Dalberry Lees ladies supremely happy.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MR STOTFOLD'S ESTABLISHMENT



"The Quarry!"

AKING it in a galloping point of view, there is no doubt that the stag-hunter has a decided advantage over his brethren of the chase, whether fox-hunters or thistle-whippers, in always being sure of his game. He is like a man with his dinner in his pocket, sure of a feed wherever he is. Whether the stag-hunter's game will run or not, is another question; but the same may be said of the fox and the hare. Still, the stag-hunter never has a blank day; he is sure of

seeing the animal descend, at all events, and if he won't condescend to run, the true sportsman has the same privilege that the costermonger had with his donkey "vot wouldn't go"—namely, the right of "larruping him." To the fair sex the stag is truly invaluable, and we should think the ladies would poll twenty to one in favour of the stag over the fox. They see the actual animal that has to be hunted, instead of having to draw upon their imaginations for the idea.

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Then, look at the independence of the thing. While the fox-hunter's anxieties continue all the year round, aggravated by perfidious keepers, faithless friends, and are never more acute than on the particular morning of the meet, the stag-hunter turns about in his bed with the easy indifference of the sluggard, conscious that he, at all events, will be all right, and can lay his hand on his game on the instant. No trappers, no shooters, no unpunctual earth-stoppers, disturb the calm serenity of his repose. He is not afraid of the foot people molesting the cover, or of lazy sportsmen stopping short by its side. The hare-hunter may go flop, flop, flopping about the country, peering into all the bushes and tufts he comes near, without finding what he wants, but the stag-hunter has his proud beast under lock and key, and has only to shoot the bolt, give him a kick, and set him a-going.

Then there is something fine, wild, and romantic in the idea of stag-hunting, heightened by the pictures one sees of the performance—the forest glade, the boundless moor, the impassable-looking ravines, the glassy lake, the horns, the hounds, the hubbub. It is the happy confusion of fiction with fact, the blending of the glories of the past with the tameness of the present, that tends to keep the flag of stag-hunting flying in the ascendant. Still, as with Stotfold, so with other masters, many people did not care to see the stag-hounds a second time. They like to say they have seen a stag-hunt, and having seen one are satisfied, and don't let out that things were not quite what they expected. And now for our friend Mr. Stotfold.

We wish we could accommodate the sporting reader with a list of Mr. Stotfold's stag-hounds; but, unfortunately, the same difficulty presents itself that we encountered at the outset of this story with regard to Mr. Romford's pedigree—namely, that we did not know anything; the fact being, that Mr. Stotfold did not keep any list. That, however, is in reality of little importance; for his huntsman, Jack Rogers, being a liberal of the first class, did not burthen himself with much nomenclature either, and just called the majority of his hounds by any name that came first into his head, so that the Cheerful of one day

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might be the Careless of another, and perhaps the Countess or Caroline of a third.

Mr. Stotfold generally had about five-and-twenty couple of hounds in kennel, hunting from eighteen to twenty couple, according as the exigencies of the rope and the casualties of the chase operated on their number. He did not begin with a whole pack, but bought a lot of drafts at the hammer, which were vacillating between the Indian market and the tan-yard. These came in pretty cheap—some three or four and forty shillings a couple; and a hound being a hound in Mr. Stotfold's estimation, he limited himself to three guineas a couple in future—three guineas being his outside price. Of course he got some for a great deal less—for nothing, in fact, sometimes, it being common among huntsmen, when they had a headstrong, skirting, babbling, incorrigible animal that they could make nothing of, to exclaim to their whips, "Send him to Stotfold! send him to Stotfold!" Hence, as may be supposed, he had a very miscellaneous assortment of crooked-legged, blear-eyed, broken-coated, loose-loined, flat-sided malefactors in his possession.

Two very remarkable hounds, however, he had—namely, Wideawake and Wiseacre; not brothers, as the alliteration would lend one to suppose, for they were as dissimilar as it was possible for animals to be, but so christened respectively on account of their extraordinary powers and performances. So long as Jack Rogers, the huntsman, had either Wideawake or Wiseacre before him, he was pretty sure that the stag was before the hounds, and made himself perfectly easy about the rest of the pack. The reader can therefore do the same, and dismiss the rest as a lot of makeweight incorrigibles, possessed of almost every mental and bodily defect hounds are capable of. We will now describe the flower of the pack, in case any of our readers would like to breed from them.

Wideawake was a yellow or light tan-coloured hound, with bright hazel eyes and a very Spanish-pointer-like head and expression of countenance. Indeed Jack Rogers, who was a bit of a utilitarian, used to say he wouldn't despair of making

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him point still. He—the hound, that is to say—stood twenty-five inches high, with a drooping kangaroo-like back, terminating in a very abruptly-docked tail, looking, indeed, more like an Italian iron, as used in laundries, than a hound's stern. Nor were his personal defects his sole demerits. He ran mute, and being a queer, unaccountable-looking animal, was as often taken for the stag as for a hound. "Yeas, ar seed him," the countrymen would reply to Jack's inquiry if they had seen the stag; "yeas, ar seed him; short tail and arl, agoin' as ard as ivir he could lick."

Wiseacre was quite a different description of animal, being of the bull-dog-like order, black and white in colour; very much the sort of animal one sees chained under a carrier's cart. He was short and thick, with a big bald face, loaded shoulders, crooked legs, and flat feet. Unlike Wideawake, he was of the vociferous order; and though he did not throw his tongue prodigally, he yet did it in such a solemn sententious sort of way as always to carry conviction to the pack. He could hunt both the stag and Wideawake, and run under Wideawake's belly when he came up with him. Between the two, Jack reckoned he could catch almost anything; Wideawake making the running, and Wiseacre keeping the clamorous party on the line.

And it was a fine, cheering, invigorating sight to stand on a rising ground—Rounhay or Greenley Hill, for instance—and view the whole panorama of the chase. The noble but unantlered monarch lobbing and blobbing across country, making for all the railway stations, cabbage garths, and horse-ponds he could see, with the deficient-tailed Wideawake leading the boisterous pack by some hundred yards or so, while sedulous Wiseacre plied his nose diligently (doing a little skirting occasionally), to recall his comrades in case they overshot the joint scent of Wideawake and the stag, Jack Rogers and his plump master crashing and cramming after them. And now for a word about Rogers.

Jack Rogers, as we will now take the liberty of calling him, began life as a circus man, being attached to the then flourishing *troupe* belonging to the late Mr. Nutkins, so favourably known

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throughout the southern counties; and Jack was great both in the saddle and the sawdust, enacting the drunken huzzar with the greatest fidelity, and throwing somersaults without stint or hesitation. Unfortunately, however, he had a difference with the clown, Mr. Smearface, who, instead of visiting Jack with imaginary cuts with his whip, used to drop it into him with such a hearty goodwill as caused Jack, who was amazingly strong and an excellent boxer, to thrash him, not figuratively, but literally, within an inch of his life. To escape the consequences that seemed likely to ensue, Jack bolted to Boulogne, where he presently became boots at the "Roast Beef of Old England Hotel," a house, we need hardly say, greatly frequented by the English. Here Jack took to learning the language, and adapting himself to the manners and customs of the country, whereby he greatly bettered his condition; for the English like to get a lesson in French for nothing, and Jack, being a sharp, clever fellow, adapted himself to their humours, calling himself Jean Rougier, getting his ears bored, wearing moustache and a good deal of bristly hair about his round, good-humoured face.

At length Jack tired of "mossooing," and returned to England at the active age of forty, just as old Father Time had shot the first tinge of grey through the aforesaid bristly jet-black hair. He then became a valet to a young gentleman of the name of Pringle—Billy Pringle—whose mother was what the servants call a "quality lady": that is to say, a lady of rank—to wit, the Countess of Ladythorne, wife of the Right Honourable the Earl of Ladythorne, of Tantivy Castle, in Featherbedfordshire. Here Jack—or rather Jean, for he still retained the *persiflage* of the Frenchman—did very well, having plenty of society and little to do, beyond cheating the young gentleman, who was a very easy dupe. Unfortunately for Jean, however, his master's mother, before being a countess, had filled the honourable office of a lady's maid, and was well versed in the mysteries of servitude generally, and resented Jack's premature abstraction of clothes and constant purchase of infallible recipes at his master's expense—recipes for making

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boots black, recipes for making boots brown, recipes for making boots white, recipes for making boots pink, recipes for making gloves white, recipes for making gloves drab, recipes for making gloves cream-colour, and so on through the whole catalogue of cleanable, renovateable articles of attire.

And, having hired Jack for her son when she was not a countess, but a Mrs., her ladyship was very plainspoken with Jack, who, being full of beans and independence, as these sort of gentry generally are, threw up his place at once, saying it was far too "mean and confining for him," and cast himself upon the world at large generally, little doubting that he would very soon be sought after. Somehow or other, though, Jack was out in his reckoning, and though he plied both the French and English characters assiduously, and was often apparently within an ace of being hired, yet somehow the engagement always fell through at the last moment, and the seedier Jack got, the quicker came the refusals. One gentleman to whom he offered himself as a French valet wanted an English one; another to whom he offered himself as an English one wanted a Frenchman; a third wanted a taller man, a fourth a thinner man, a fifth a younger man—all requirements that Jack could not comply with. The fact was, that though he was a dark-complexioned man, there was a certain indication about his nose that it would have been well if he could have purchased a recipe for removing. Though he always placed himself with his back to the light when under examination, yet somehow the parties generally got him coaxed round to the window before they were done with the scrutiny. And then came the thanks and the sorries, and the tantalising promises to write if they thought more of him, as if any of them ever meditated doing anything of the sort after they had once got rid of him.

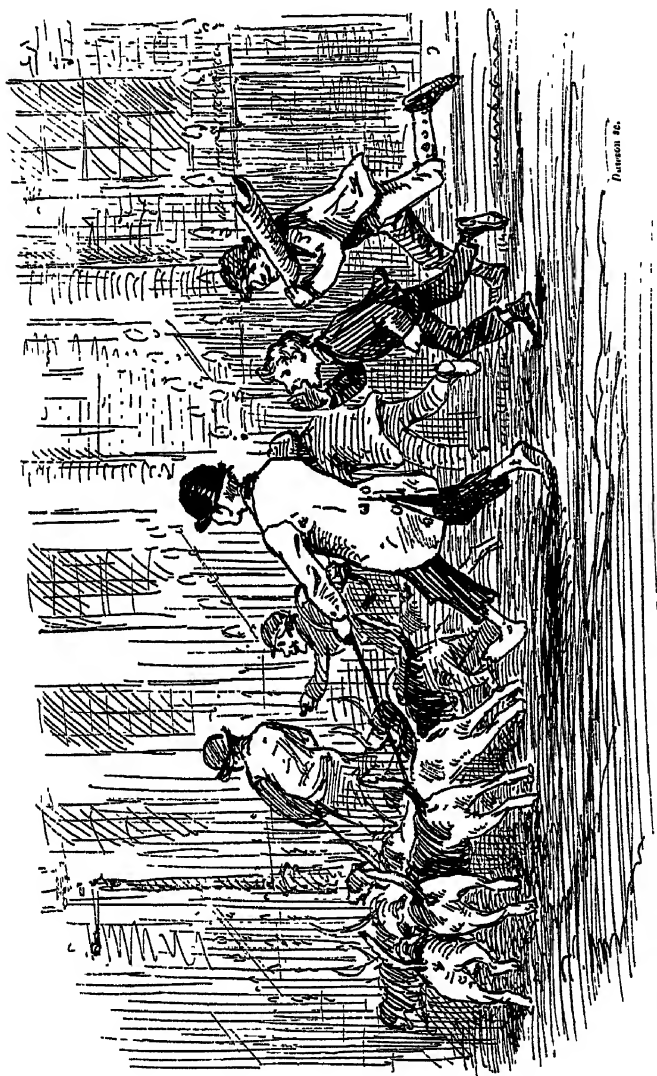
There is nothing so deplorable as a seedy valet. A man had fifty times better be without any than have one of those painfully brushed glazey-clothed gentlemen, who look as if the whole concern had been bought second-hand. Jack, having in the days of his prosperity indulged in bright colours, went more rapidly downhill than the wearer of soberer garbs would have

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done, and at length he got so shockingly shabby that the gentlemen's gentlemen began to hesitate about passing him on to their masters when he went to look after a place. He was a very different Jack to what he used to be at the second tables when, in the full adornment of jewellery and latitude of presumption, he bullied the pages, and found scarcely anything was good enough for him. Now he was only too glad to sit down in the hall amid the general ruck of servants, and get what he could on the sly.

At this juncture it occurred to Jack that there are other ways of obtaining a livelihood than by valeting, and, though valeting certainly was the easiest and pleasanter line of all, he had no objection to his early professional career, and bethought him of trying his luck in the sawdust circle once more. Accordingly he sought out Mr. Crackenthorpe, the manager of Crackenthorpe's Royal European Hippodrome, and offered his services as a general performer; but twenty years had made a striking change in Jack's elasticity of limb. Instead of coming cleverly through the paper balloon, after throwing a somersault, he hit his head against the hoop, and sent it flying into the pit. Then, having accidentally slipped from his saddle when rehearsing the part of Billy Button the tailor, he could not regain his seat for some seconds, and was so blown with running alongside the brute and trying to pacify him, that Mr. Crackenthorpe lost all patience, and left his *locum tenens* to bow him out at his leisure. Jack then withdrew from that line entirely, and after driving a country doctor about in his pill-box for three months, who worked him both day and night, he was next found as the odd man at Skidmore's Livery and Bait Stables in Pont Street, Pimlico, with twelve shillings a week and a hay-loft to sleep in. If Sir Bernard Burke, having exhausted the vicissitudes of families, were to turn his hand to the vicissitudes of servants, he would not find a more checkered or eventful career than that of our distinguished friend Mr. Rogers.

But it is a long lane that never has a turn, and Jack's turn came at last. One fine summer's afternoon in the height of a London season, when every job-master could send out double



"FIVE COUPLES EACH."

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the number of vehicles he could supply, and when every caitiff with a coat to his back was elevated to the rank of a coachman, one summer's afternoon, we say, as Jack was clattering about Skidmore's yard in the wooden clogs of servitude, with straw bands wrapped around his ankles, our squeakey friend Mr. Stotfold came rolling in in a high state of excitement, demanding first the master, then the mistress, then the ostler, then the helper, then anybody he could see. He had just bought ten couple of hounds at Tattersall's and didn't know how the deuce to get them away, or what to do with them when he had got them away. And, as luck would have it, there was nobody in the yard but Rogers—Rogers attired as aforesaid—"but needs must," says the proverb, "when a certain old gentleman drives," and our master had no alternative but to address himself to Jack. He told him candidly how they had knocked the hounds down to him, and how he wanted them housed.

Now, Jack had a turn for the chase, and when with Mr. Pringle at Tantivy Castle, on a visit to his late master's noble mother, the Countess, had cultivated the acquaintance of Mr. Dickey Boggledike, Lord Ladythorne's huntsman, and knew all about boiling and feeding and kennelling, at least thought he did, and gladly volunteered his services to Mr. Stotfold.

"If Jack could only get a man to mind the yard while he was away, he would go for them himself," he said, and a job brougham coming in at the moment, he transferred his responsibility to the driver, and, divesting himself of his *sabots*, put on an old puce-coloured livery vest, now worn almost black, and proceeded on his way to the Corner, inwardly hoping his employer might prove as simple as he looked.

The hounds were in two lots of five couples each, now, however, clubbed together like a bunch of onions, pulling and striving, and straining all ways to be off they didn't know where to, and Jack, seeing the position, summoned the intelligent barefooted man in the old green-collared Surrey hunt coat and cap, who haunts the passage, and directing him to divide them (Jack thinking it would be better for Surrey man to be bit than him), each then seized the tow rope of five couple, and separating

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them proceeded up the entry, and down Grosvenor Place with his charge, amid cries from the attendant street urchins of "Talli o! talli o! A hunt! a hunt! Vere do you meet? Vere's the stag? Have you seen my oss? Crikey O! vot a hugly man!" meaning, of course, Mr. Rogers. The "hugly" man, however, had his hands too full to be able to resent the indignity, and, moreover, saw the fat boy's large figure looming in the rear.

"Handsome is that handsome does," says the proverb, and the way our friend managed his hounds, and above all the skilful compliments he paid Mr. Stotfold on his judgment in buying such a nice-looking lot for so little money, completely ingratiated him with our master, and made Mr. Stotfold glad when Jack hinted that he wouldn't mind giving up the capital place he then had under Mr. Skidmore and coming to him. And Jack, not overrating himself—indeed, putting his services rather low, Squeakey and he quickly came to terms, and Jack left his *sabots* in Pont Street for the man who came after him. He then became a huntsman—huntsman to Mr. Stotfold, master of stag-hounds, in which capacity the reader will now have the goodness to view him.

He had a capital time of it, too, for his master being ignorant enough to hire him, was ignorant enough to keep him also, and a peripatetic stag-hunter like Mr. Stotfold was not troubled with those too critical fields that raise or lower the fame of a huntsman, according to the sport he shows. Jack was not only huntsman but master of the horse, buying the meat for the kennel and the forage for the stables, making up in overcharge on the articles what he considered himself underpaid in the matter of wages.

Hunting on what the swells call the scientific principle was quite beside Jack's mark. Nevertheless he could ride—ride over almost anything, and also blow the key-bugle, and seldom or ever had he occasion to play—

"Oh where and oh where is my Highland laddie gone!"

in consequence of losing his stag. If he whiles, as he said, let the hounds have a bite of its haunch, it was to make the lobbing

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gentleman more agile in future, Jack being of opinion that if a hound once put his fangs well into him, the stag would take care not to let him do it again if he could help it. At least, Jack knew he wouldn't if he were the stag.

Such, then, was the gentleman now invited by Mrs. Watkins to meet our distinguished sportsman Mr. Romford, and obliterate the recollection of the Carstangs disappointment.

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CHAPTER XLIV.

MR STOTFOLD ARRIVES AT DALBERRY LEES.



RAILWAYS are capital things for long distances, but they don't do much for short ones. It is a grand thing to fly from one end of the kingdom to another in a day, but, for anything within ten miles, there is nothing like having one's own horse or conveyance.

With them there is no hurry or confusion, ten minutes is neither here nor there, but one minute makes all the difference with a railway. It is very provoking to see a train gliding smoothly out at one end of a station as we come hurrying in at the other; yet such things do happen with parties wearing even the best regulated chronometers. But if railways do little for travellers, they do less for visitors, who are generally set down either far too early or much too late—extremes greatly to be deprecated. It is tiresome in the short winter days, when there is no alleviating turn to take round the farm or the garden, to have to consume the intervening time before dinner in the house, still worse to meet the first course leaving the dining-room, all hopes of one's coming being extinct.

Neither of these casualties, we are happy to say, awaited our friend Mr. Stotfold, for, having consulted his amanuensis, Mr. Tomkins, the station-master at Pickering Nook, that official chose him a train that would not only set him down in good time, but secure him a conveyance to Dalberry Lees, "It being no fun," as Tomkins truly said, "to have to walk several miles in the dark." This was a through train, and many of the passengers having come long distances and made themselves

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comfortable, were not inclined to be disturbed, certainly not to admit a stranger of our friend's dimensions, so the usual artifices were resorted to, dummies exhibited and babies plied at the windows, it being a well-ascertained fact that there is nothing so efficacious as a *babby* for keeping men out of a carriage. But Loggan, the guard, always had a place in reserve for a "gent" like our friend, and now obsequiously met and led him along the line to a newly-painted carriage, in the centre compartment of which were only an elderly lady and her handsome, but slightly *passé*, daughter, who he knew would have no objection to the introduction of such a stranger as Squire Stotfold; indeed Loggan rather thought that the two travelled for the purpose of picking up an eligible young man if they could. And the fat boy having squeezed himself in sideways, squeaking his apologies as he got himself seated, proceeded to unfold his rug and set his tongue a-going on a sort of general issue expedition—weather, crops, concerts, balls, picnics, the usual staple of unmarried conversation—making himself what the ladies call very agreeable, or very forward, according as they or another is the object of attention.

But it was a short-lived triumph, for they had hardly got the full swing of conversation established ere the slackening speed of the train announced a coming stop, and it presently pulled up before the now familiar Firfield Station. Loggan's rosy face then appeared at the carriage window, announcing to our master of stag-hounds that his railway journey was at an end. Mr. Stotfold had, therefore, to tear himself away from his newly-found friends before he had even run them to their homes. With a radiant smile to each, out then he rolled, wrapper and all, and presently began squeaking for a porter—"Porter! Porter! Porter!"—attracting all eyes to the windows to see such a jolly cockatoo, all green and yellow and red, for the fat boy did not seem to think he could make himself sufficiently conspicuous. The train presently sped on, and having given up his ticket, he began squeaking for the 'bus.

Independent Jimmy stared with astonishment as the fat boy's great stomach came looming along, tightly buttoned into a

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bright green double-breasted cut-away coat with a buff vest, yellow leathers, and rose-tinted tops, his short neck being adorned with a bright scarlet sensation tie, secured by a massive blue and gold ring.

"'Bus, 'bus! where's the 'bus?" squeaked he.

"'Bus!" growled Jimmy, eyeing him, adding, "sink ye should have a barge."

But the fat boy still continued his vociferations.

"Are ye ganning to tak' the whole on't yoursel' now?" demanded Jimmy.

"No, only me and my man," replied the boy, pointing to a grinning little ear-ringed Frenchman, all teeth and hair, like a rat-catcher's dog.

"Ar dinna think we can hould any but yersel'," replied Jimmy, "ye're se fat," added he, looking him over.

"Hut," snorted the boy indignantly, half inclined to kick him; "an impudent 'busman talking to a master of stag-hounds in that way."

"Why, then, ar tell ye what, ye mun just wait for the melon-frame," replied Jimmy, "for there are two women, 'maist as big as yoursel' with their hoops, who want to be gannin wi' me."

"Melon-frame!" squeaked our friend; "melon-frame! what the deuce have I to do with a melon-frame?"

"It's the private carridge," explained Jimmy "and ye'll ride far comfortabler, and besides be set doon at the Dalberry Lees door, 'stead o' bein' left by the side of the road with the 'bus," and Jimmy's master appearing at the moment, bearing a basket of live geese, Jimmy jerked his head at our fat friend and said, "Here's a gent wants to be gannin wi' ye."

The melon-frame door was then opened, the wraps were put in, and the fat boy squeezed himself in sideways, leaving his valet to see to the luggage. All being presently adjusted, "*Jip!*" cried the driver, and away they drove from the station. Twenty minutes brought them to Dalberry Lees. Here, though Mr. Stotfold, master of stag-hounds, expected to be the hero of the party, yet he was not so in reality, being in fact

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only auxiliary to Mr. Romford. Indeed, if it hadn't been for our fox-hound master, Stotfold wouldn't have been there at all. So, when he rolled into the drawing-room after his name, and found Mr. Romford, who had somewhat recovered from his Tarring Neville fever, playing the flute to Miss Cassandra Cleopatra, he took him rather smally, just as a master of fox-hounds might be supposed to take a master of harriers. In this he was somewhat confirmed by finding Mr. Romford in mufti—tweed ditto suit—instead of being arrayed, as he himself was, in the costume of the chase. Stotfold thought a master of hounds should always look like his work.

Stotfold, indeed, had not ascertained his exact status as a master of stag-hounds, and having found his name when he advertised his meets at the top of the list of hounds, along with the Queen's, a baron's, a baronet's, and so on, thought himself entitled to look down upon the followers of all other branches of venery, and looked down upon them accordingly. He talked of the Queen and I, Davis and I, Bessborough and I, &c. Nor was Stotfold's ignorance peculiar to himself, for Mrs. Watkins, fully believing she was going to give Mr. Romford a great treat, would not anticipate his delight by telling him the name, so Mr. Romford was kept in a state of pleasurable excitement.

The reader will therefore readily imagine that it was with no very satisfactory feelings that our Master was interrupted in the middle of his accompaniment on the flute of Miss Cassandra Cleopatra on the harp, in the popular air of "Dixey's Land," by the announcement and entry of this extraordinary contribution to the chase. Facey started, for his puffing and blowing had prevented his hearing the ring and arrival, and, as he sat with his back to the door, it was only by Miss Cassandra Cleopatra breaking off abruptly to do the honours in the absence of mamma, that Facey was sensible of the presence of a stranger. Up he got too, and instead of finding Lord Who-knows-what, confronted the before-mentioned fat boy.

"Mither Romford, Mither Stotfold," lisped the fair lady, and as soon as Mr. Stotfold relinquished her soft hand, which he

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claimed just as he would that of one of the nymphs of the Pickering Nook Station, he tendered his own to Mr. Romford.

Romford looked unutterable things, for, besides the disappointment of a good introduction to a master of fox-hounds, he had had a bill sent in for two new gates which he was sure the fat boy had smashed the last time he enlarged his quadruped at Pine Hill Clump, besides which he owed him one for the trespass in his country. So Romford just gave him two fore-fingers of his left hand, holding his flute in his right one as if he was going to break it over his head. The ceremony of introduction thus over, Facey then resumed his seat, and the fat boy having looked round the room to find a chair large enough to hold him, at length wheeled one up to the scene of the music, and composed himself in it. Miss then rang the bell to let mamma know Mr. Stotfold was come, thinking it better to have four people in the room than three. Mamma presently came sailing in, and received the great stag-hunter in state. Still she saw by Mr. Romford's face that all was not right. It wore much the same sort of aspect that it did on that unfortunate bag-fox morning.

Not so, however, Mr. Stotfold's. From living so much alone, he had a pent-up torrent of words to discharge, and having now got a listener in Mrs. Watkins, he opened the flood-gates of his vehemence and squeaked and chattered away with the utmost volubility, in the midst of which Facey and Cassandra resumed the interrupted melody of "Dixey's Land." Before they concluded, friend Willy made his appearance, nursing and feeling his side hair as usual, and then Mr. Stotfold had another victim to his noise.

We need scarcely say that this being what Facey would call a "bye-day," Lubbins had not the satisfaction of displaying her cookery, and the thing was very flat and unprofitable compared to the former occasion. The fact was, Mr. Facey had been over with his flute once or twice since then, and Mrs. Watkins hoped things were gradually drawing into the family circle line; they, therefore, only sat down eight to dinner, Mr. Tuckwell, Mr. Horsington, and Mrs. Dust, near

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and short-notice neighbours, making up the number. Mrs. Dust, of course, was engaged to help to keep the course clear for Cassandra. But if the party was small, the noise was great, the fat boy going in at everything that was said, and giving his opinions in the most authoritative way. When, however, the ladies retired, the real amusement commenced, for not content with lauding the stag-hounds, he must needs sneer at the fox-hounds, which of course got Mr. Romford's back up, who held fox-hunting to be the finest sport in the world. So the evening did not pass very harmoniously, and Mr. Facey was glad when he found himself back in the drawing-room.

Let us now pass on to the next morning.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE BENICIA BOY



“H, mamma, there’s Lorrimer, the latheman’s cart!” exclaimed our lisping friend, looking out of the window, as they all sat at breakfast the next morning. “I’ll get him to examine my black lathe scarf.”

“Laceman!” squeaked Stotfold, looking out, adding, “No; *It’s* my deer-cart.”

“Deer-cart!” replied Miss Watkins, jumping up and running to the window, adding, “Deer-cart is it? Why, who’d have thought of a deer keeping a cart?”

Squeakey was right, however. It was indeed the deer-cart—the deer-cart followed by a most heterogeneous assemblage of foot-people collected from the various villages through which it had passed on its way from the station. High up on a solitary seat sat the driver, dressed in Lincoln green, lording it over the old white horse as though he were driving four-in-hand. The lofty vehicle, which was painted dark green, was ventilated from the roof, and displayed on its side, in white letters on a black ground, the walking advertisement of “AUGUSTUS STOTFOLD, ESQUIRE’S DEER-CART, PICKERING NOOK.” The vehicle, as Hood says in his “Epping Hunt,” was—

“In shape like half a hearse—tho’ not
For corpses in the least;
For this contained the deer alive,
And not the *dear deceased*!”

Then a deputation from the stables having met the procession, and fixed upon the exact spot—a slightly rising ground just

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before the mansion-house, where the noble animal might be enlarged in full view of all the spectators—Lincoln green wheeled the cart round, and dropping his reins on the old white horse's back, prepared his own mouth to receive the contents of the then coming cup—

“ And letting go the *reins*, of course,
Prepared for *heavy wet*.”

The drain over, he returned the mug, and then rising in his little seat, began flagellating his own chest with his arms, causing the Benicia Boy, for it was none other than the mischievous fellow inside, to stamp and thump with his feet, to the terror of the little boys who expected to have him amongst them directly. The more the man thrashed, the more the deer stamped, doubtless expecting every moment to be ejected from his comfortable carriage. And, now, where are all your visions of rousing the antlered monarch from his lair, ye enthusiastic souls? Or where the wild expanse of country, ye romantic ones? One view of the deer-cart on the smooth lawn has dispelled them all! Yet nobody likes to exclaim, “Wot a go!” But see! here comes Jack Rogers and the hounds! Jack about half seas over from the ovations he has received on the road. His cap is cocked jauntily above the left ear, his pink is thrown carelessly open, even to the exposure of a much-stained buff vest, while his badly-cleaned boots seem on the worst possible terms with his dirty Bedford cords, hardly indeed inclined to approach them at all.

He is riding a great raking, white-heeled, cock-thropled chestnut, who throws his snaffle-bridled head up and down in a way that would look very like spoiling Jack's beauty if he had any. A little behind the pack comes a diminutive man in a red coat and drab gaiters, riding a most powerful dray-horse-looking brown for the fat master. This is a horse called “Hatter-his-heart-out,” from his notorious rough action, a quality that, while it has caused his ejection from other stables, has procured him admission into Mr. Stotfold's, whose idea of a hunt corresponds

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with the familiar label on a doctor's bottle, "When taken to be well shaken."

Jack Rogers wishing to have his kennel "sweetened a little," as he calls it, an operation of not very frequent occurrence with him, has brought out all its contents, young and old, big and little, wild and steady, coupling up the most incorrigible, and ruling over the whole with a formidable loose thonged whip, held ready for immediate action. Jack is evidently of honest Sancho Panza's opinion, "that it is good to have command, if only over a flock of sheep;" so he rides in the middle of his curs, looking as solemnly wise as half-drunken men generally do. The hounds raised a wild cry as they caught sight of the deer-cart, and would infallibly have broken away had not Jack distributed sundry telling cuts amongst the thick of them, thus converting their cries into howls. This second scene of the grand sporting drama, again roused the inmates of the house, and as the ladies now withdrew to put on their bonnets, Mr. Romford crowned himself with his drab wide-a-wake, and, providing himself with a good cutting whip from the armoury in the passage, opened the front door, and vaulting the rails, proceeded to where the noisy group stood baying—towing, howling, and scratching themselves. We don't know whether it was instinct or chance, or the effect of previous instruction, but Jack gave our master of foxhounds such a salute with his cap as seldom falls to the lot of any man in mufti. It wasn't a touch of the peak, or a rise, or a lift, but a bold bodily take-off from the head, with a fine aerial sweep that nearly brought his cap in conjunction with his cock-thropped horse's ears. The hounds too increased their vehemence, so that altogether there was a very pretty reception.

Mr. Romford, who was used to caps, good, bad, and indifferent, just jerked his hand in return, and proceeded to cast his scrutinising little eyes into the body of the pack—a very slight inspection satisfied him that he had never seen such a collection before.

"Nice looking lot of hounds," at length said he, addressing Jack, who sat cockeily on his horse, wating the customary compliment.

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"Yes, they are," replied Jack, "very nice looking lot of hounds—good as they look, too."

"Set of rubbish," muttered Romford, turning half round on his heel.

"Want a little dressing here, don't you?" asked Romford, rubbing his whip down the back of a desperately dull broken-coated hound.

"Ah, why he scratched whiles," replied Jack, "but it's nothin' to signify."

"Isn't it?" thought Romford. He then took another good stare at the pack.

"Are they any particular blood?" at length asked Romford, not being able to recognise the slightest family likeness amongst them.

"Well, no," replied Jack; "we just pick them up here and there. That one," pointing to our before-mentioned yellow friend Wideawake, "is from the Kensal Green Kennel—one of the best hounds p'raps in England. There's another," said Jack, pointing to Wiseacre.

"Good as he's ugly, I s'pose?" muttered Facey.

Squeakey and Willy Watkins now joined the gay throng, the latter in a desperate funk; for if fox-hunting was formidable, stag-hunting, he understood, was tremendous—always went straight. Still he essayed to keep up his courage, and advancing, whip under arm, as he drew on his white buckskin gloves, he proceeded to return Jack Rogers' vehement salute, Jack being now further fortified by a couple of glasses of Dalberry Lees rum.

"Monstrous nice pack!" exclaimed Watkins at random. "Monstrous nice pack!" hardly knowing what he was saying, but wishing most devoutly that he was coming in from hunting instead of going out. "Oh, dear! why was there ever such torment invented?" thought he.

"Well, and how's the Benicia Boy this morning?" squeaked Stotfold, as soon as his huntsman's attentions were directed to him.

"Oh, why he seems pretty hamiable, I think," replied Jack; "but I've brought Old Scratch in case he shouldn't run."

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"Ah, which have you here?" squeaked the Master.

"The Boy," replied Jack. "Scratch is shut up in the lamp-room at the Galliburn Station."

"Hope they won't let him out?" squeaked Mr. Stotfold.

"No fear of that, unless he comes out at the skylight; for I've got the key of the door," said Jack, producing a large ringed key from his coat pocket as he spoke.

"All right," squeaked the Master; adding, "p'r'aps you may as well be going?" Then turning to Mr. Watkins, he asked, "if there was any place where they could put up the hounds while they turned out the stag?"

"Oh, yes," replied Mr. Watkins, rather taken aback at the question, his idea being that they all started fair together. "Oh, yes; put them up somewhere;" adding, "ask my man;"—our friend not exactly knowing whether they should be upstairs, or downstairs, or in my lady's chamber.

Away then Jack trotted up to the stables, and the interest of the scene was again concentrated on the deer-cart. There it stood as solemn as before, looking like a double-tailed tadpole, with its two tapering lines of spectators bearing away from its body. If the horsemen mustered meagrely, the deficiency was amply supplied by the footpeople.

It seemed to have attracted all the idle population of the country, and the cry was still They come! they come! Joiners in their paper caps, shoemakers in their leather aprons, grooms in their fustians, gardeners in their shirt sleeves, all agog to see the wonderful wild beast. The fair sex too were duly represented; and besides a Barcelona "crack-'em-and-try-'em" nut-merchant, there were two orange-girls, and an unlicensed dealer in spirituous liquors. Expectation stood on tip-toe as to what the solemn looking deer-cart contained, one thinking the stag would be like a unicorn, another that he would resemble a goat, a third that he would be like Billy Batson's ram. Still, whatever it was, they all seemed disposed to give him a wide berth, by keeping a most respectful avenue open for him instead of giving him a chance of sticking or eating any of them up when he came out.

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And now, as our fat friend waddled round the corner from the stables, the commotion increased; the deer's coachman moved his van a few paces to arouse the noble animal, whose formidable feet might now be heard stamping upon the boards of his equipage.

The fever of excitement was then at its height. The gaping rustics stared wider than ever, the big boys stepped back a pace or two, and the little ones trembled, many of them wishing themselves at home again. But when the fat boy squeaked the order to "*Let 'im out!*" there was a feeling of disappointment throughout the throng; for there were neither horses, nor hounds, and those who expected to see the stag start off directly, thought he would be over Rainford Hill before they could ever get them out. On this point, however, they were presently undeceived, for though the door was opened by the old gentleman in charge, creeping cautiously along the top of the van and shooting the bolt, yet no deer appeared, and those who durst take a peep in from either side, saw a rather donkeyfied-looking animal backing its hind-quarters against the far end of the vehicle, as though it wanted to be out that way. But the old gentleman in green, who had a long whip, much at the service of the animal, proceeded to administer the butt end through the ventilator; and after sundry downward thumps, producing a series of indignant snorts and stamps, it at length operated beneficially, causing him to jump out, and, head in air, to trot leisurely down the avenue of spectators, amid the derisive shouts and yells of the mob.

In truth, the Benicia Boy was not a very wild or imposing looking animal, his coat being dull and worn in parts, while one of its sides was powdered with whitening caused by a restive rubbing against the wall of its town-house in Pickering Nook. Still the Boy could go when inclined, and had given our fat friend some severe leads out, indeed on one or two occasions had been lost altogether, or Jack Rogers having got rid of his master had pretended to lose him, in order that he might indulge in a drink, and resume the sport on the following day. But the Boy was not to be depended upon—sometimes

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he would go, and sometimes he wouldn't, in which latter case, of course there was nothing for it but the donkeyman's alternative that we mentioned before, of larruping him, an unbecoming proceeding with a beast of venery.

All anxiety about his now immediate escape was speedily dispelled by the leisurely trot he now took about the lawn—looking this way and that, as though he hardly knew whether he would go on or come back to his box. He seemed quite easy about the matter, very unlike an animal put on trial for its life. At one time, indeed, he looked as if he would make for the garden, but there he was frustrated by the intervention of the kitchenmaid going down from the house for the vegetables. He then looked in at the dairy, and finally trotted off down the carriage drive, past the gaudy-gated lodges, and so on to the turnpike.

The ejection of the stag over, the excitement of the scene seems to collapse. Those who want to see more of him follow in his wake; but the majority stay behind to talk him over, and criticise his performance. At all events, there is none of the wild enthusiasm caused by the sudden start up of the hare off the fallow, or the hustling, bustling, get-away-close-at-his-brush of the fox from the cover. On the contrary, there is a vacuum between the turning out and the laying on, that may perhaps be advantageously filled up with a cigar. So, as the semi-theatrical gentlemen say, with a smile and a bow, when they want to break the performance in two, "there will now be an interval of ten minutes, if the reader pleases."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE STAG-HUNT.



BEING now refreshed, we return with ardour to the chase. The Benicia Boy, as the reader will remember, is away—trotting gaily along the road, startling the horsemen and astonishing the footpeople, sniffing the fresh air as if it were more agreeable than that of his box. Our sportsmen are up at the stables. Mr. Romford adjusting the stirrups of the saddle on one of Willy Watkins's horses for himself; Mr. Watkins, already on his horse, most earnestly wishing himself off; and grinning Jack Rogers, all eager for the fray, thinking how he will astonish the natives.

The first thing that now struck our master of foxhounds was our squeaky friend Mr. Stotfold vociferating for the rope—"Where's my rope? I haven't got my rope! Get me my rope!" as if he was bent on immediate self-destruction.

"Rope!" exclaimed Romford, "what the deuce do you want with the rope? Have your hunt out first, at all events."

"For the take, to be sure," squeaked fatty, laughing now, receiving a coil of rope from a servant, which he slipped into a large inside coat-pocket, just as a clown in a pantomime disposes of a goose or a few yards of sausages. The boy then gave his fat self a hearty shake as if to ascertain that all was right, and thinking it was—money, keys, watch, buns, cigars, rope, and all, he next began squeaking for his horse.

"Now, then, I want my horse! get me my horse! where's my horse!" and forthwith the dray-horse-like brown emerged from the side-stable, for our master to mount. But this wasn't

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so easily managed as thought, for Willy Watkins had abolished the steps at the end of the stable as antediluvian, without providing a substitute, and Stotfold's legs being short, and his horse high, he hopped about with one foot in the stirrup, without daring to attempt the grand final hoist.

"Get me a pail! get me a pail!" at length squeaked he, relinquishing the effort, and forthwith two helpers rushed out with a pail each, while a third punched and pushed the punchy horse up to where they stood. Stotfold then made a bold effort, and landed in the happy haven of his enormous saddle, and began shuffling and working himself about like a jockey trying to establish a seat. At length he got one to his liking, and Romford having mounted his horse, things at length seemed all ready for a start. But the fat boy, instead of ordering Jack Rogers to liberate the pent-up pack in the straw-house, pulled his cigar-case out of his breast-pocket and deliberately selecting a weed, began squeaking for fire wherewith to light it—"Has anybody got any fire!—has anybody got any fire!" demanded he, and Facey, who had just lit his pipe, handed him it, and the fat boy proceeded to imbibe and blow up a leisurely cloud, instead of pursuing his deer as hard as he could.

While all this was enacting, Brisket the butcher, and two or three other horsemen—or, more properly speaking, ponymen,—who had met the Benicia Boy, were having a most enjoyable hunt. At first he seemed inclined to sulk, but Ballinger the carter's whip being freely administered, awoke him to a sense of his danger—if not of his duty—causing him to put his best leg first, and eventually to place two or three stiffish fences between him and his pursuers. The further the Boy went, the further the field were now left behind, and as the Benicia Boy passed through the orchard at the back of Mr. Tithemtight's rectory, the last of them left him, and he was only incommoded by farmer Badstock's cur. This he presently disposed of by a rush and a stamp of his foot, and then went trotting leisurely over the clean linen on Mrs. Martindale's drying-ground, from whence he passed into Mr. Ketherington's

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nursery-garden, and had a dance among the winter-cabbages and Brussels sprouts.

The sound of voices and of horses' hoofs on the stones now roused the inmates of the straw-house, drawing forth a joyous yell, and when Jack Rogers shot the bolt, every hound bounded out full cry, and spread in all directions. Bouncer made straight for the dairy, Rantipole rushed into the scullery, while Prodigal and Poulterer dived up to their ears in the pig-pail.

"Get on, and blow your horn!" now cried Romford, unused to such riotous proceedings, and dropping his whip-thong, he proceeded to lay it into the offenders with hearty good will. Jack Rogers aided his endeavours, and by the time the fat boy appeared in front of Dalberry Lees, he had as many hounds about him as if he was making a cast. Unfortunately, however, Miss Watkins's Shetland pony was careering about the park, and certain anonymous hounds, thinking, perhaps, he would do as well as the stag, proceeded to charge him with vigorous determination, while a few others broke away at a cow. Then the horn and whips were at work again; the fat boy inflated his cheeks till they looked like bladder-balloons, and Rogers and Romford raced round the respective detachments of deserters to whipcord them back, at which Willy Watkins's horse denoted his delight by sundry squeaks and bounds in the air that nearly sent our friend over its head—"Oh, for Mr. Stotfold's weight to keep him down!" thought Willy.

The rule of Mr. Stotfold's hunt was for the master to hunt the hounds as long as he could, after which Mr. Rogers was at liberty to take them, and, both carrying horns, the arrangement answered very well, as Jack was always ready to face any place his master declined. And Jack, who was a bit of a courtier, always magnified his master's performance.

"That was a most terrific jump you took into the Adderley Road, just below the windmill," he would say; or "I never saw a man ride over a brook better than you did over Long

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Kitlington Burn—wouldn't have had it myself at no price ;” the said Burn, at its best being about three yards wide, with sound banks on each side.

But let us pursue the Benicia Boy.

There not being much chance of a scent where the preliminary hunt had taken place, the fat boy had nothing for it but to cast on till he came to virgin soil, and it was not until he neared farmer Badstock's fold-yard that the redoubtable Wideawake dropped his stump of a stern, and Wiseacre endorsing the movement with his tongue, the rest of the pack were good enough to take their opinions from him, and, gradually closing in, at length assumed somewhat the appearance of a pack. “*Hoop !*” screeched Jack Rogers, cheering them on, as if it was the most brilliant move that ever was made. He inwardly hoped Mr. Romford saw it.

The Benicia Boy, as was his wont, had taken a turn round the country before deciding which line to adopt, astonishing sundry country folk by his appearance among them. Old Tommy Cobnut cutting fern in Brambleton brake for bedding for his pig, young Johnny Gooseman taking his colt to the shop, sundry girls playing at pitch-halfpenny at the low corner of farmer Hoggin's field, instead of pulling turnips at the high one—all of whom stood staring with their heads up, wondering whatever the Boy could be. One said he was a donkey, another that he was the devil, a third that he was a Kyloe. At length the notes of the horn, and the cheer of the hunters came wafted on the breeze, and first one pedestrian and then another telegraphed the line of the chase to our friends with their hats or their hoes or their arms.

Jack Rogers now began to grin, for he saw the stag was going to run, and he thought Mr. Romford couldn't fail but to be highly delighted with the entertainment. Indeed, like Jawkins with Mrs. Somerville, he almost fancied Mr. Facey might tip him.

“*T-o-o-ld* you so !” exclaimed Jack, rising in his stirrups ; “*t-o-o-ld* you so !” repeated he, pointing with his whip to

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where Wideawake was now leading, as usual. And Jack cheered the allied forces to the echo. Then,

Invincible Jack and invincible Jowler,
Invincible Tom and invincible Towler,

all laid their heads together to assist in the grand consummation of the catch.

The scent was now strong and good. They all seemed to enjoy it; even the generally mute ones threw their tongues occasionally, and the skirter closed in for their share of the fun. So they raced along Galloway Lane, down Dinlington Hill (astonishing a gipsy camp at the turn), and, striking away across Castle Kennedy Common, made for the dewy vale of Horbury Heath beyond. This was one of the misnamed, or rather nature-changed, countries—like many commons, chases, and meres, which now present nothing of their original state; and Horbury Heath, instead of being a wild, desolate track, frequented only by plovers and poachers, was a rich alluvial soil, with stout quickset fences and very wide, uncomfortable-looking ditches. Now, the Benicia Boy was fond of leaping, and made for the thick of these impediments, bucking and bounding as if they were so many skipping-ropes, to the great discomfiture of many of his followers. Here Mr. Willy Watkins, having sorely scratched his face, declined any further distinction. At Brailsford Bank, however, the field was presently recruited by the appearance of our coatless friend, Independent Jimmy, who, having now got a young iron-grey in lieu of Mr. Hazey's old horse, thought to try if he could do anything in the hunting way. So, on meeting the stag bobbing along, he unharnessed the young horse from the melon frame, and tying his aged companion up to a gate, was ready mounted, bare-backed, blinkers and all, when the tailing hounds came toiling up.

"He's on," said Jimmy, jerking his head the way he had gone, and on they went along the grassy siding of the road, which the Boy had run on, in preference to the hard. Mr. Rogers was now in command, the fat boy having fallen in arrear at



The "Bonnie Boy" artist's sketch. The artist's sketch.

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some of the more formidable places, and his rough-actioned horse, Hatter-his-heart-out, having worked him up into a considerable stew.

So far the Benicia Boy had kept clear of the towns, and would most likely have continued that course if they had not come in his way; but the pretty little village of Cherryford standing on rising ground, temptingly diversified by green slopes and gardens, was too inviting for an enterprising stag to withstand. So, taking the village diagonally, he passed through Mr. Collupton's flower-garden, over Mr. Hopkins's bleaching-field, into Pansey's nursery-ground, and from thence into a high beech-hedged slip of ground, interspersed with swings, hoops, and gymnasiums. This was neither more nor less than the playground at the back of Miss Birch's finishing and polishing seminary; and, in all probability, the Benicia Boy would have passed quietly along the passage, through the centre of the house—the *vis-à-vis* doors of which stood invitingly open—and so out on to the lawn in front, but for the wretched jingling notes of the old school piano, that parents buy so often over in the course of their children's education, causing him to stop and listen attentively, to hear whether it was his old friends the hounds or not. Retreating a few steps, with a slight digression to the right, brought him in front of a plate-glass window, at which, after contemplating himself attentively, he made a most deliberate dash, landing handsomely in the drawing-room, clearing the globes and a model of Vienna. What a crash and commotion was there!

"*Murder! thieves! murder!*" screeched Miss Birch, hurrying down from her bed-room.

"*Thieves! murder! thieves!*" roared the cook.

"*Pollis! pollis!*" squeaked the page, rushing frantically out the front way.

But, before any extraneous assistance could arrive, the redoubtable Wideawake came bounding through the window too; and the Benicia Boy, seeing his old enemy, rushed at the now open door, passing over the prostrate body of Miss Birch, and making along the passage for the front of the house, without

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waiting to read the beautiful rainbow-shaped blue and gold *affiche*, MISS BIRCH'S FINISHING AND POLISHING ACADEMY, exhibited conspicuously in the garden, he cleared the iron rails at a bound, knocking off the hat of the pedestrian postman as he passed with the letters. The cook then having closed the drawing-room door on Wideawake (who did not like again facing the window), the immediate progress of the chase was arrested.

The cock-thropled chestnut having got into difficulties, Jack Rogers was glad to catch at a holloa, which lead him clear of the small enclosures around Cherryford village; and now, getting his horn, he clapped forrard with his hounds, to lay them on at the windmill, where the view was just given to the south. Here they hit upon a scent untarnished by Wideawake, who, Jack candidly admitted (in reply to Facey's uncomplimentary observation, that he ought to be hung), was "rather o'er swift o' foot for them that day;" and Wiseacre led the long-drawn line with his accustomed vigorous energy. But Wideawake was the dog the Benicia Boy most dreaded, for he was in the habit of haunching him unawares; whereas Wiseacre, like the filial Irishman who never kicked his father when he was down, always gave him timely notice of his coming. Still, Wideawake had his use, in keeping the stag going when he might otherwise be inclined to soil or to sulk. Being now pent up at Miss Birch's, the Boy soon found he hadn't him in his wake, and began taking things in the easy, leisurely sort of way that a crow takes a gamekeeper on a Sunday, or a fox trots away before a party of shooters on a week day. There the noble animal might be seen going like a galvanised donkey, now trotting, now bucking, now trotting again; passing from pasture to fallow, and from fallow to wheat, in the open, undisguised way of a quadruped that is not afraid to be seen. He hasn't robbed a hen-roost, or run away with an old fat goose. He got his living like a gentleman, not like one of those skulking marauders called foxes, who were continually attacking people's poultry, and committing petty larcenies of that sort. He was above such work; could carry

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his head high—and high he did carry it. So on he went at a stilty trot as before.

At length the Benicia Boy, having traversed some eight or nine miles of country, which at the old posting price of eighteen-pence a mile, and three-pence to the driver, would come to some fifteen shillings and nine-pence, possibly bethought him he had done enough for his dinner, and, being no longer tormented by the impetuous Wideawake, began casting about in search of repose. He did not want to break any more windows, for he thought he had scratched himself in the side at Miss Birch's, and would rather prefer a barn or an outhouse with some clean straw in it. So he skirted the side of Hackberry Hill—half field and half moor—staring complacently round the country in search of what he wanted. There was a church steeple in front, denoting a village, another to the left, with a third in the rear. The latter, however, wouldn't do, for he heard Jack's horn, with the occasional accompaniment of the hounds—*yooou, yooou, yap, yap, yooou, yooou*, they went.

Just at this moment the picturesque outline of Pipeington Tilery presented itself, stretching its long length half across a five-acre field, offering every accommodation, including a mud-bath, that an aristocratic stag could desire; and thither our unantlered monarch decided on entrenching himself. So, sinking the hill, he struck boldly across country, not trying to take the tilery in the flank, but going right at the centre, spoiling as many green bricks as he could in passing over the drying ground. He then blobbed down into the spacious mud-bath between it and the tilery, and began swimming and cooling himself in its yellow waters. Great was the commotion the descent caused in the tilery. Tom Sparrow, the boy in charge of the pug-mill, who saw him coming, and thought it was Geordy Crosier's trespassing donkey, now stared as a hen stares when her ducklings take water. The moulders ceased their labours, the wheelers dropped their barrows, the clay-diggers their spades, and the firemen left their furnaces. It was confusion all and consternation. What the devil was it? The cry of the hounds and the cheer of the hunters presently

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enlightened them; and, looking to the left, they saw the gallant pack streaming down Hackberry Hill, closely followed by Rogers and Romford, and the man on the grey.

"Sink it'll be a stag!" exclaimed one.

"So it will!" roared another.

"That fat man's from the Nook," rejoined a third.

"Keep him in! keep him in!" was now the cry as the Benicia Boy struck out boldly for the tilery. Then they hooted and shooed him, and pelted him with clay.

If the hounds tailed, so did the field; and Rogers, Jimmy, and Romford alone rode with the pack.

"He's taken soil!" exclaimed Jack, now pointing with his whip to the tilery commotion, as Romford and he galloped down Hackberry Hill together.

"Soil, is it?" said Romford, "it looks to me very like water."

"Oh, that's what we stag-hunters call soil," replied Jack, inducting Romford into the science.

"Do you?" rejoined Romford, thinking they might as well call it by its right name.

"For-rard! for-rard!" cheered Jack, thinking that Romford cannot fail to be highly delighted with the performance. Jack then looks back for his master.

And sure enough, on the now almost white-lathered Hatter-his-heart-out, comes the fat boy, puffing and blowing and looking very like a peony. He has indeed had a tremendous gallop, Hatter-his-heart-out having acted well up to his name, and nearly shaken him to pieces. Since our master, Mr. Stotfold, declined the dangerous in favour of Jack Rogers, he has had a good deal of rough fencing to contend with alone; none of the leaders of the chase doing much for their followers in the way of breaking the fences, and the heterogeneous group who united their fortunes with his, expecting "red coat" to do all for them. So he had nothing for it but to throw his magnanimous heart over each fence, and follow it as quickly as ever he could. And though Hatter-his-heart-out was a desperately rough galloper, he was a very smooth leaper; measuring, however, his ground so closely, as always to make the fat boy

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think he was going to let him down, thus keeping him in a state of constant labour and excitement.

Indeed but for the honour and credit of the thing, he should have preferred stopping before; for though it was undoubtedly a good thing to get a good gallop, yet the operation might be overdone, and the appetite injured instead of promoted. What he wanted was, to bring it home with a bloom upon it that would entitle him to oysters and porter and a substantial repast after. That he thought he had got before he came to the wind-mill, consequently all that had taken place since was what might be called work of supererogation. And now that he saw the prospect of a close, his flagging spirits rose within him, and getting Hatter-his-heart-out short by the head, he stood in his stirrups giving a squeaking cheer to his followers as he pointed out the strange confusion in the vale below. He then made for the tilery as hard as ever he could. What a hubbub was there! Clowns from all parts had turned up to the scene—clowns from the ploughs, clowns from the harrows, clowns from the hedges, just as the roughs turn up in London at the prospect of a row—Willy and Harry and Jackey and all.

They thought the stag was going to be killed, and that they might come in for a slice. So they hemmed the Benicia Boy in on all sides, determined he shouldn't get away, despite Squeakey's urgent entreaties that they would let him land. Then the before-mentioned rope was produced from Mr. Stotfold's inner pocket, and Hatter-his-heart-out being resigned to a lad, our master commenced lassoing the stag with clumsy dexterity. Now he was near him, now he was wide; now he was near him again. At length he lassoed and landed him, amid the cheers of the populace. Instead, however, of sticking and skinning him as the countrymen expected, giving the head to Willy, the neck to Jackey, and the haunch to Harry, Mr. Stotfold began staring about, squeaking for the carriage. He wanted the old gentleman in green again.

"Have you seen my fellow?—have you seen my fellow?" demanded he, running from party to party.

"Have you seen my fellow?" asks he, rushing up to

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Independent Jimmy, now standing by the side of the panting iron grey.

"Nor, arm d——d if iver ar did," replied Jimmy, bursting into laughter.

At length the carriage was seen stopping the way at the top of Cinderby Lane, and a man of the place was induced by the promise of a shilling to go and conduct it through the field to the tilery. The while it was jolting its way down the ruddy road, nearly tilting old Solomon out of his seat, our fat friend cast about on foot fishing for compliments on the length and severity of the run.

"Capital (puff) gallop," said he, cooling his cauliflower head by taking off his cap. "Excellent (gasp) run," continued he, mopping his brow with a yellow Bandana. "Never saw the old (puff, gasp) Benicia Boy in such (puff) before. Can't have come less than twenty miles—twenty (puff) miles in (puff) and twenty minutes."

Then he approached Mr. Romford, who he thought ought to have come to him.

"Well, and what do you (puff) of it?" asked he, still continuing the mop of his greatly perspiring brow.

"Well, oi, ha-hem-haw, think it's just about the ha-hem-haw sport oi know," replied Mr. Romford; adding, "oive half a mind to set up a pack myself to hunt the same day as the foxhounds, in order to draw off the superfluos of the field."

And the fat boy, feeling the compliment, but fearing the consequences, blurted out in reply—

"Don't, my (gasp) feller, I'll (puff) mine down whenever you (gasp)."

And thereupon he tendered his fat hand to Romford, who concluded the bargain with a shake.

The deer-carriage then came jolting down to the tilery, and a feed of oats in front and a kick behind soon sent the Benicia Boy back into the place from whence he came, amid the jeers and chéers of the populace.

Just then the sound of lamentation arose high above the shouts and clamour of the crowd. It was Jack Rogers bewailing



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the loss of his favourite hound, running about wringing his hands, asking if any one had seen him. "Seen a yellow pied hound with a short tail—a yellow pied hound with a short tail?" But we need scarcely say that nobody at the tilery has, for Miss Birch having kept the redoubtable dog safe under lock and key until her strong job gardener came, he administered such a bastinadoing as sent the old dog scampering home, with his short tail between his legs, as hard as ever he could. In vain, therefore, Jack whooped and halloaed, and twanged his horn. No Wideawake came.

"Oh, he'll cast up," at length squeaked Mr. Stotfold, getting tired of the wait. "He'll cast up," repeated he, making for where Hatter-his-heart-out was still being led about by the boy. Then, getting the horse into a clay hole, he made a vigorous assault on the saddle, and, having settled himself in his seat, he chucked the lad a shilling, and drawing his thin reins, with a touch of the spur put his thick horse in motion.

The hunt was then up; the disappointed chaws returned to their clays and their clods; anxious Jack Rogers moved off with his hounds, still casting about for the lost one; and Mr. Romford was surprised to learn from Independent Jimmy that they were only five or six miles from Dalberry Lees.

"Ar'll show you the way," said Jimmy, jumping on to the bare-backed grey; and taking a line of his own, irrespective of either gates or gaps, he proceeded to make his way across country.

"Ar think nout o' this stag-huntin'," observed Jimmy, running the grey at a great on-and-off bank, with a wide ditch on each side.

"Nor I," rejoined Mr. Romford, following him.

"When you've caught the stag, ye're ne better off than ye were afore," observed Jimmy.

"Just so," said Romford.

Jimmy then angled a wide pasture at a trot, and was presently contemplating a rough, bush-entwined, rail-mended-fence, with a too obvious brook on the far side. Jimmy ran the grey at a rail, but, hitting it with its fore feet, it landed on its head, shooting Jimmy well over it.

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“Greate numb beast!” exclaimed Jimmy, jumping up and catching the horse as it rose. He then pulled the rail out for Romford.

A few more fields brought them to where Jimmy had placed his second horse; which now having reached, he prepared to resuscitate the melon-frame, leaving Mr. Romford to pursue his journey without him.

“Ye can’t miss yer way,” said Jimmy, jerking his head in the direction of Dalberry Lees. “Ye can’t miss yer way. Just keep axin for the biggest feuil in the country, and they’ll be sure to send yer to Lees.” So saying, he gave our master a nod, and turned away to the right.

Mr. Romford then rode on, and having a good eye for country, soon took his bearings, and without troubling any of the country people with the inquiry Jimmy propounded, speedily found his way back to the glittering gates. Then, having arrived at the house, he alighted at the front door and desired a footman to take the horse round to the stable; which saved him an interview with Gullpicker, Mr. Watkins’s Melton groom, whom nobody would have at Melton. Then Miss met him, all radiant with smiles, so glad to see him safe back; mamma was delighted to hear Mr. Romford say he was much amused with the hunt, and altogether she thought they had made a great hit in having the fat boy down. And out came the flute and the harp for “Bob Ridley.”

CHAPTER XLVII.

MR. STANLEY STERLING.



R. FACEY ROMFORD had now got pretty well settled in his saddle in Doubleimupshire. He had seen most of the great guns of the country: the Watkinses and the teapot-handle man, and had now extended his acquaintance to the fat boy and the interesting family of the neighbouring master of hounds, Mr. Hazey. He had also established a nodding and "how-are-ye" acquaintance with the non-hunting Fuller, and Fowler, and Binks, and Brown, and Postle, and Hucklebridge, whom he prudently sir'd or mister'd in blank, instead of risking a shot at their names, and perhaps making a bad hit. There is nothing people dislike so much as being misnamed.

The country, if not first-rate, was fairly sporting: good enough for those who lived in and knew it, and yet not good enough to tempt peripatetic sportsmen out of their ways, unless, indeed, they happened to have a billet with some one in it. This immunity from strangers was a great comfort to Mr. Romford, for some men are troubled with such a mania for pack-seeing, that there is no saying but an inquisitive stranger might have strayed from the other Mr. Romford's, and instituted an invidious comparison between our master and him. Not that any one could take exception to our friend's hounds, or his horses, or his system of hunting; but they might have raised the question, Which was the right Romford?—asserted, perhaps, that Facey was not the man who lived at Abbeyfield Park, which would have been very discouraging and difficult to gainsay. A

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master of hounds ought not to have his attention distracted by extraneous matter—especially a master hunting his own hounds, as our friend did.

Like most countries, Doubleimupshire varied a good deal : some parts of it being good, some of it indifferent, and much of it bad. The low-lands were deep and boggy, with great false-bottomed drains, large enough to hold both horse and rider ; but, then, these very drains contributed to the sound riding of the up-lands, they being, in fact, the receivers and conveyers of the superfluous water that fell. Then there were the Bentley Hills, over which hounds raced ; and the Heckington and Stanborough vales, where they dwelt, requiring all the Romford science and energy to get them along. Taking the country, however, as a whole, the soil was favourable to scent, as the staple of it was generally good. And Romford's hounds could solve the difficult problem, " Which way has he gone ? " in most parts of it.

The best part of the country, undoubtedly, lies between Shervington Bridge and the town of Farmington Hill ; but, then, it was infested by game preservers, who were generally suspected of Dalberry Lees practices, with regard to the illicit production of foxes. Formerly, three fields out of every four in this part were ploughed ; but, since the repeal of the corn laws, the system has been reversed, and three fields are now in old grass or clover ley, for one that is under the plough. The enclosures, too, are large and roomy—twenty and thirty acres each, with not over and above strong fences ; but the land is deep and holding—or what Mr. Otto Musk, the Leicestershire swell who got straggled there, once described as " flat, dirty, and unpleasant." Still, there were no fences mended with old wire-rope in them, and the brooks are generally fairly jumpable—at least, when not flooded.

But we will indulge in a day in this the most favoured locality, and select a meet at Independent Jimmy's friend, Mr. Stanley Sterling's, he being about the only real sportsman on that side of the country.

Mr. Sterling was a comfortable man, and was waited upon

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by a woman. After that, we need scarcely say he was a bachelor: for where is the lady who will submit to be tended by one of her own sex, if she can possibly help it? Well, Mr. Stanley Sterling was a comfortable man, and was waited upon by a woman. He lived at a pretty, old-fashioned, gable-ended, grey-roofed place, called Rosemount Grange: where there was always a spare stall for a horse, and a hearty welcome for a friend. Moreover, there was generally a good wild fox to be found in his cover, Light-thorn-rough, at the back of the house, the next morning.

Let us also suppose that Mr. Facey Romford—lured, perhaps, by the fame of Mr. Stanley Sterling's nutty sherry, ruby port, and comfortable *ménage* generally—has come over to Rosemount to be handy for the meet on the morrow; and that Mr. Freeman, of Shenstone Burn, commonly called Old Saddlebags, and the clergyman of the parish, form the *parti quarrré* for the evening.

Freeman, who is hard upon eighty years of age, has hunted all his life, and looks more like sixty than what he really is. He is a stout, square-built man, with silvery-white hair, shading an extremely rubicund face, with strongly marked lines, and whipcord-like muscles; a little, twinkling, grey eye lights up an intelligent countenance.

In marching order—that is to say, the day before hunting—Mr. Freeman travels in his red coat and other hunting things, having his horse-rug rolled up before him, and the aforesaid saddlebags, containing his dress things, underneath him. Thus accoutred, he makes for the house of the nearest acquaintance he has to the meet, where Bags and his horse are always heartily welcome. Compared with the pyramids of luggage with which a modern exquisite travels, Saddlebags' wardrobe would seem strangely deficient; but Bags had lived in times when locomotion was difficult, and people had to think what they could do without, and not what they could do with—which, after all, is a great ingredient in travelling.

And yet to see the old gentleman come down in his nice black dress-coat, frilled shirt, and clean vest—the latter vying



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the whiteness of his hair—with black shorts, silk stockings, and pumps, no one would suppose but he had come in his carriage, with a valet to boot. There he stands before Mr. Stanley Sterling's bright parlour-fire with a beech-log on the top, as radiant and sparkling as the fuel itself. There, too, is Mr. Romford, looking him over, thinking what a man he is for his years; and now in comes the Reverend Mr. Teacher, the vicar, and the party is complete.

Mr. Stanley Sterling did not attempt side-dishes, but let his cook concentrate her talents upon a few general favourites. Hence, the ox-tail soup was always beautifully clear and hot, the crimped-cod and oyster-sauce excellent, while the boiled fowls and ruddy ham ran a close race with the four-year-old leg of roast mutton, leaving the relish they give for the "sweet or dry" to support their claims for preference. Beet and mealy potatoes accompanied the solids, and macaroni and mince-pies followed in due course. A bottle of Beaujolais circulated with the cheese. They had then all dined to their hearts' content. As Romford chucked his napkin in a sort of happy-go-lucky way over his left shoulder, he thought how much better it was than any of the grand spreads he had seen. Grace being said, the plate-warmer was then taken from the fire, the horseshoe-table substituted, and each man prepared to make himself comfortable according to his own peculiar fashion.

And as each succeeding glass of bright port wine circulated down Mr. Saddlebags' vest, the old man warmed with sporting recollections until he became a perfect chronicle of the chase. He seemed to remember everything—when Mr. Princeps had the Hard and Sharps—when Mr. Tedbury had the Larkspur—when Sir Thomas Twyford had a third pack that hunted all the country east of Horndean Hut, and so across by Broad Halfpenny woodlands to the town of Cross Hands in Marshdale. Then he got upon the subject of runs. That *tremendous* run from Trouble House to Wooton Wood, eighteen miles as the crow flies, when nobody could get near the hounds for the last two miles save little Jim, the second whip, on a Pretender mare—the best animal that ever was foaled—no fence too

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large or day too long for her. Or that *magnificent* day from Scotgrove Hill to Wellingore, when some of the crack men of the Hot and Heavy Hunt were out, and they ran from scent to view in the middle of Heatherwick Moor, thirteen miles, without allowing for bends,—the finest men with the finest finish that ever was seen! To all which Mr. Romford sat listening as he would to a lecture. Facey dearly loved to pick up such stories at the end of a stinger. He kept weeding his chin till he almost made it sore.

Dinner having been at six, at nine o'clock precisely—for fox-hunters are generally pretty punctual—Bridget, the maid, re-entered the room with the tea-tray, just as the second bottle of port was finished, thus putting a stop to the veteran's recitals and causing him to fall back on the sherry. A game of whist followed tea, and Mr. Teacher having taken his departure, Mr. Facey retired to his comfortable couch with five shillings more in his pocket than he brought. "Not a bad night's work," muttered our master, as he added a couple of shillings to it that he had of his own. He never gave house-servants anything, alleging that he could take care of himself,—nor stable ones either, if he thought his horses would fare as well without his doing so.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

[MR. STANLEY STERLING'S FOX.]



BREAKFAST at Rosemount Grange was conducted pretty much on the London Club principle, each guest having his separate *ménage*, viz., two teapots, one containing the beverage, the other the hot water, a small glass basin of sugar, a ditto butter-boat and cream-ewer, together with a muffin or bun, and a rack of dry toast. A common coffee-pot occupied the centre of the round table, flanked on the one side with a well-filled egg-stand, and on the other with a dish of beautiful moor-edge honey. On the side-table were hot meats and cold, with the well-made household bread. Hence, each man, on coming down, rang for his own supply without reference to any one else—a great convenience to foxhunters, who like riding leisurely on instead of going full tilt to cover.

On this auspicious day, however, it was “all serene,” as old Saddlebags said, the master being in the house, and the hounds having to meet before the door; so they dawdled and talked as people do who are not in a hurry and are sure of being in time. Mr. Romford was the only one who felt any concern, but his was not the uneasiness caused by the fear of unpunctuality, but alarm lest the redoubtable servants should arrive in a state of inebriety. Lucy, however, had undertaken to see them safe away from Beldon Hall, and the strong persevering man, who brought Mr. Romford’s horse, was charged to look after them on the road. And very creditably they both fulfilled their mission, for as our master was deeply absorbed in the dissection of a

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woodcock's leg, the click of a gate attracted his attention, and looking up he saw the gay cavalcade pass along the little bridge over the brook into the front field, in very creditable form—Swig sitting bolt upright on his horse, and Chowey preparing his succulent mouth for fawning operations on the field.

The sight acted electrically on the party: Mr. Sterling finished his tea, Mr. Romford took the woodcock leg in his fingers, and old Bags quaffed off his half-cup of coffee at a draught. They were then presently up and at the window. Bridget went out with the bread, cheese, and ale on a tray, while Mr. Sterling unlocked the cellaret, and produced cherry brandy and liquors for those who chose to partake of them. In came Bonus, and Dennis, and Bankford, and two or three other never-miss-a-chancers. Meanwhile our host and his guests are off to the stable, where the horses are turned round in the stalls all ready for a start. They mount and away, Romford on the Baker, late Placid Joe, Bags on his eighteen-years-old bay horse, still called the "colt," and Mr. Sterling on a five-year-old iron grey of his own breeding. Thus they come round to the front, to receive the "sky scrapes" of the men, and the "mornin's" and "how are ye's?" of the field.

Then more horsemen came cantering up, and more went into the house. At length the time being up—say a quarter to eleven—and Mr. Facey making it a rule never to wait for unpunctual people, be their subscriptions ever so large, now gives a significant jerk of his head to Swig, which, communicating itself to Chowey, the two instantly have their horses by the head with the lively hounds bounding and frolicking forward the way the horses are going. The foot-people run and open the white gates, the parti-coloured cavalcade follow in long-drawn file, and the whole are presently in front of Light-thorn-rough—a cover so near the house and yet so secluded as almost to look like part of the premises. A deep triangular dell of some three acres in extent, abounding in blackthorn, gorse, broom, and fern, presenting in every part dry and most unexceptionable lying. The bridle-gate leading to it was always kept locked, and there was no foot-road within three-quarters of a mile of

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it. Here, indeed, a fox might repose. Some persons are always certain that covers will hold a fox—even though they may have been shooting in them the day before—and keep repeating and reiterating the assertion up to the very moment of testing its accuracy. “Sure to be there!—sure to be there! Certain as if I saw him!” perhaps with a view of hiding their delinquency. Mr. Stanley Sterling was not one of the positive order. He knew the nature of his wild animal too well to be bail for his appearance. So in answer to numerous inquiries if they are likely to find, he merely says he “hopes so,” and then takes up a quiet position for a view, a point from whence he can see without being seen himself.

“*Cover hoick!—cover hoick!*” now cries Mr. Facey Romford, and in an instant he has not a hound at his horse’s heels. The “Hurl’s” man, and the man with the mouth too, have deserted him, the former to take up a position by the beeches above, the latter to hide his ugly face in the dip of the dell.

“*Eleu in there!—eleu in!*” cheers our master, as Gamester and Woodbine take a flourish towards a slope of close-looking gorse.

“Very likely place to hold a fox,” observed he to himself, pulling a sample out of his beard and inspecting it. “Please, gentlemen, keep together! and don’t holloa!” now cries he, looking round at the chatterers—Mr. Bonus asking after Mrs. Hemming’s horse, Mr. Daniel Dennis wondering if it was going to rain. He has got his best coat on, and forgotten to look at his weathercock to see whether it is a safe venture or not.

Like the Ashby Pasture gorse in Nimrod’s celebrated Leicestershire run, the cover soon begins to shake in various parts, the obvious effect of some twenty couple of hounds rummaging about it. The vibration increases with more activity towards the juniper bushes in the centre of the cover.

“*Have at ’im there!*” cheers Mr. Romford, with a crack of his whip, as if to awake a sleeping fox from his trance. “*Have at ’im there!*” repeats he, in a still louder key, now standing erect in his stirrups, contemplating the rich sea of bright undulating gorse. The vibration of the bushes increases,



THUNDERER FIRST, RESOLUTE NEXT, ALL THE REST IN A LUMP.

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varied with the slight crackle from the snapping of rotten branches in the more open parts. "Fox, for a 'underd," muttered Mr. Romford, now buttoning the second top button of his "Tick"—"Fox, for a 'underd!" repeats he, and scarcely are the words well out of his mouth ere the short sharp *yap, yap*, of Pincher the terrier is followed by the deep sonorous voice of old Thunderer proclaiming the fact. "Hoick to Thunderer! hoick!" cheers Mr. Romford, now standing on tip-toe in his stirrups, gazing intently on the scene, his eyes raking every corner of the cover, like Daniel Forester's on dividend-day.

And now the melody increases—twofold, threefold, fourfold, fivefold, tenfold—now it's all melody together—

"More nobly full and swell'd with every mouth,"

as Somerville—not our fair friend, but the poet—sings.

"Now," as Romford asks, "where are all your sorrows and your cares, ye gloomy souls! or where your pains and aches, ye complaining ones! One holloa will presently dispel them all."

"Hark! there it is! Talli-ho! a-w-a-ay! Talli-ho a-w-a-a-y—a-w-a-ay!" The "away" stretched to the length of the rope-walk. It's Daniel, the Right Honourable the Hurl of Scamperdale's Daniel, holloaing at the very top of his husky voice, each succeeding note becoming louder and better.

And now little Tom Chavey unfurls at once his proboscis and his flail-like whip, and with repeated "Get away, hounds!—get away!" seconds the sporting-like twang of Mr. Romford's horn. Then what a scatter there is of the late combined forces. The late clustered phalanx is dissolved; its component parts are flying here, there, and everywhere, each man looking after his own particular leader, to whom he trusts for that knowledge of the country that his flurry effaces. Where's Jack? Where's Joe? Where's Tom? Then Mr. Saddlebags rises greatly in public estimation, and whispers are heard among the uninitiated of "Stick to old Bags!"—"Follow Bags!"—"Bags knows every inch of the country." And the Octogenarian gets the

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colt by the head and slips out at a corner into the grass fields on the left of the cover. There he commands the pack as they break—Thunderer first, Resolute next, Prodigo third, all the rest in a lump. Thunderer strikes the scent by the side of the wall, Prodigo endorses his dictum, and the rest of the pack adopt the same. Away they go like beans. And just at the critical moment the Honorary Secretary, who is riding a bay runaway with a dead side to its mouth, which has passed through half the hands in the country, gets the Pelham bit between its teeth, and charges into the thick of them, knocking over Rosamond and Rallywood, and scattering the rest right and left.

“Rot ye!” roars Romford, flourishing his whip, as he bounds over the stone wall that separates them—“Rot ye! what are ye after now? C-o-r-n-found ye, you riband-dealer,” adds he, as he gets up to him, “what brings yer out here?” exclaiming with a scowl, as he passes on, “you should be condemned to shop with two old maids for a month!”

Then, as the astonished hounds get themselves scrambled up, and the pack gathered together, our master caps them on to where a countryman is halloaing the line of the fox from a gate.

“That’s him!—that’s him!” shouts the man, as Traveller and Trumpeter strike the scent just as the body of the pack come up, when, heads and tails being again united, and the scent first-rate, every hound settles to his fox, and away they go with the stream of the chase up at very high pressure. “Away—away!” is the cry. The hounds seem to fly over the country like pigeons, now at Oakforth Green, now at Broadpool Banks, and anon at the wooden bridge over the Brent. Romford is with them; Swig and Chowey not far off; and Stanley Sterling is a little on the left, each going on his own particular line. The Baker has had the benefit of two holding clayey fallows, and may now resume the taking name of Placid Joe, while Mr. Sterling’s five-year-old grey, after a few tail-first presentations, begins to face his fences, and seems to enter into the spirit of the thing. He gathers courage as he goes. That is more,

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however, than some of the field do, for Bonus and Barnkford, and two or three others who started with the hounds thinking it was a case of plain sailing, begin to tail off as fences supersede field-gates, and occupation-roads run out into the privacy of fold-yards. Then there is a grand divergence either to the Corsenside Lane, down which Mr. Saddlebags' broad back may be seen hustling along *in extremis*, or in the direction of Heathery Top, towards which Mr. Hubbock, the fat farmer, is gallantly leading. Either way will bring them to Berrington Hill, for which, if the fox is not pointing, he "did ought to be." But the leaders are right! Ah, yonder yokel, leaning on his plough-stilts, has seen him pass through the sheep on the netted-off turnips, sending the stupid muttons scampering together in a crowd. Now they wheel about as if they are going to charge. Chaw halloas at the top of his voice, regardless of the fact that the hounds are in as full cry as the racing nature of the pace will admit.

"Hold your row!" shouts Mr. Romford, brandishing his whip, but he might as well speak to the winds. The hounds, however, heed him not, and bustle forward on the scent with lively intrepidity—now Liberty leading, now Lucifer, now Old Sportsman coming to the front with his unerring nose. A sheet could cover them. Facey eyes them with pleasurable emotion, for he knows he has at least one man in the field who will appreciate their performance.

"For-rard!—For-rard! that's the way of him!" shrieks he, as they again stretch into telescopic point towards the head. "There they go for the Darby!" shouts he.

Now he takes a startling stone wall, at which the Baker bounds so as to hit his rider's head against the branch of an impending ash and knocks his old hat right down over his nose.

"Rot the beggar!" exclaims Romford, spurring him across a rough fallow, extricating his head as he goes. He is now with the sheep and the chaw. The hounds rather falter on the turnips from the stain of the former, and the latter would infallibly have exercised his lungs again, only Mr. Romford.,



"Not the better," exclaims "wonder"

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keeping outside the nets, holds up his hand and enjoins him to silence, threatening to cram his whip down his throat. Old Sportsman applies himself diligently to the dilemma, and presently pilots them on to pure ground beyond.

"That's the way on 'im!" cries Chaw, unable to contain his delight.

"Oi know it," retorts Romford, digging his spurs freely into the Baker.

The hounds snatch themselves into progression, and away they strive as before,—Liberty leading, with Lucifer and Lavender contending for places. They are all of this year's entry—or rather stealing—and he couldn't have had better if he'd bought them.

"What's the use o' botherin' and breedin' and buyin'," thinks Facey, eyeing them, "if ye can have such as these for axin' for? For-rard!" cheers he, "for-rard!" as Benedict and Brilliant now press to the front. "For-rard, all on ye! Wouldn't take a hatful o' money for ye!" adds he, now sousing himself luxuriously into his capacious saddle. The Baker and he have fairly settled the moot question which is master, and go quite amicably together.

Meanwhile the McAdamites and riders to points poured on in their respective pilgrimages, each hoping to jump with the hounds at some convenient point or other of the now prosperous chase, and be able to say they were well up at Howell Burn, or close to the hounds down Dovecot Lane.

This independent customer of a fox, however, we are sorry to say, did not conform to the long established custom of the country, and instead of crossing Fairyclough Fields, through Winforth Rig, and out at the back of Mr. Heavycrop's farm at Milkhope, which would have joined Saddlebags' tail at Monkridge side-bar and Hubbock's a little farther on, with head in air and distended brush, he took over the fine grassy moorland country, straight for Roughfield Hill, some three miles to the north; and the farther Bags and Hubbock went, the farther they got apart from the pack. At length, pulling up on Marygate Green, Mr. Saddlebags, shading the sun from his

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eyes, sees the last of the field disappearing over the brow of Ravensdoun Hill, each individual horseman looking about the size of a marble.

"Bad job," muttered the old man, pulling the colt short round, amid the "Which way-ings?" the "Oh dear-ings!" and "What a bore-ings!" of his followers. A pilot, like a prophet, never gets thanked. If he rides his tail right, they take the credit of it themselves; if wrong, then they blow him up sky high. "Bad job," muttered old Bags, putting the colt at a stiffish, newly-switched fence. "Come up!" exclaimed he, spurring him freely, as the old horse winced and intimated his objection to the thorns. Then, perhaps thinking the fence the lesser evil of the two, he just bucked himself over into the next field. Bags then saw his line, and set off as hard as ever his horse could lay legs to the ground. Some follow, some say he is an old fool, and pull up, having had enough of the fray. Hubbock then takes another line, sorely pressed by his partisans.

Meanwhile, without the slightest regard to the ease or convenience of his followers, this truly game fox proceeds at the most punishing pace through the open-bottomed fir woods of Brakenside Law, without dwelling a moment, and onwards, still pointing north, up a portion of Kidland Hill, from whence a commanding view of the surrounding country is obtained. Here, having apparently surveyed the

"Strange confusion in the vale below,"

heard the distant cry of the hounds, the cheer of the hunters, and taken his bearings, he had apparently come to the conclusion that he would be safer in a country that he knew than in taking a turn over the other side of the hill on which he now stood. True, he had been there once or twice on predatory excursions; but when a fox is encumbered with an old fat hen or a goose on his back, he hasn't time to pick his way to the best advantage. So our friend thought he wouldn't venture any further that way. And being a fox of a good deal of

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decision and much firmness of purpose, he immediately turned his head to the west, and, running along a convenient sheep track, had a fine panoramic view of the trouble they were taking to catch him,—the clamorous hounds still pressing on in a cluster, Mr. Romford yoicking and cheering them, Mr. Stanley Sterling, in close attendance on Romford, Daniel Swig and Chowey riding side by side, and two or three horsemen—one in scarlet, two in dark clothes—labouring and sorrowing after them, inwardly wishing the hounds would throw up. Enough is as good as a feast, thought they. Then along a sandy streak, denoting the township road between Wandon and Ratchford, might have been seen, if he had not been in too great a hurry to look, the broad black back of Mr. Hubbock, leading the variegated *posse comitatus*; while the fortunate Bags creeps up with his cohort along the more favourable line of Woodridge and Stobfield House.

But a southerly wind wafts the melody of the hounds stronger and fresher than our friend likes to hear it, and not wishing to give his pursuers the unnecessary trouble of eating him, he casts the country quickly through his mind, and resolves to be indebted to his old friend, the badger at Brockholes, for shelter and hospitality. So, stealing quietly down the hill, and crossing the Bowersfield Road unseen, he runs the “flat, dirty, and unpleasant” plain with its holding drains and deep ravines. Then, having exhausted its conveniences, he creeps over the marshes to Ewesley, and at the back of the “Punch Bowl” at Newfold. So he makes a wide circle of Birdshope, skirting the tempting glades of Rosserton Wood, which, however, he is too hot to enter; and, skirting its eastern corner, he comes in sight of his projected point, the badger’s burrow at Brockholes.

If the badger is at home he may have a fight for the berth; but still that is infinitely preferable to being disbrushed, dismembered, and *who-hoop’d* by Mr. Facey Romford and his curs. So, putting his best leg first—and he had four uncommonly good ones—he tottled away in right energetic earnest, stopping occasionally as he reached rising ground to listen what

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was going on behind. At first he thinks "all is serene," then that he hears the noisy wretches far behind, next that they are coming his way, and finally that he had better be going. So away he trots as before. And at a good, steady, holding pace, never fatiguing himself, but husbanding his strength, lest he should either have to fight at the door or pass on in search of repose. He presently reaches the sandy, oak-root-entwined entrance at the high point of Thristleton Wood, where, with right foot erect, he pauses for an instant and listens, to be quite sure that the hounds are coming. He thinks not. All is still. They have apparently had enough of it. Not the first time he has beaten a pack of hounds. Yet hark! *Yap, yap, yough, yough!*—*For-rard! for-rard!* there they are again. Confound their pertinacity! how they stick to a fellow's tail. What a shame! Forty great hounds setting upon one fox. But it was no time for moralising; so, being at the mouth of the badger's earth, he just popped in, taking his chance of a fight at the door.

Fortunately for our fox, the badger was a great fat plethoric animal, fond of ease and good living, and having several chambers to his burrow, he had laid up in an inner one, so that our friend had nothing to do but pop into an unoccupied room near the entrance. He was an unsociable badger, and seldom saw company. And scarcely had our fox got himself suited, than the loud baying of a hound filled the whole cavern with noise, causing the badger to growl and plant his great head at his bedroom door for self-defence. And further withdrawn, but still most uncomfortably near, arose the general clamour of the pack, the whole now crowned with stentorian yells of "Who—hoop!" and "who-hoop!" It was the voice of old Romford, backed by those of Chowey and Swig, and the badger, being now fully alive to his situation, makes a vigorous dash at the intruder in his entrance hall, and sends Ringwood yelping and yammering out to his comrades.

Then there was a council of war what to do, some wanting the fox dug, others "let alone," in the course of which Mr. Romford's opinion was loudly appealed to.



"HE JUST POPPED IN—AT HOME!"

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"He's a rare good 'un," exclaimed Mr. Stanley Sterling, anxious for his preservation.

"Is that!" gasped the chairman of the Half-Guinea Hat Company.

"Dig him! dig him! by all means," shouted several.

"Take an hour to do it," observed Mr. Hubbock; "this is the badger's burrow, and it branches out in all directions—reaches from here to Con-*stan-tinople*."

"Oh, blood your hounds, by all means!" exclaimed Bonus; adding, "they richly deserve their fox."

"Blood 'em another day," muttered Mr. Romford—"blood 'em another day with a bad 'un. Doesn't do to be prodigal of good 'uns." So saying, with a "Cop, come away!—cop, come away!" to his baying hounds, he proceeded to reclaim the now panting tail-quivering Baker.

Then the appraisers began to estimate the run—time, distance, ditches, difficulties generally. One said it was one thing, another another, but they all agreed that it was extremely quick, and the fences terrible. A man who could ride over that country, could ride over any.

"An hour and seven minutes, 'zactly," observed Chowey, the timekeeper of the hunt, putting on ten minutes for good measure.

"Without a single real check, only two hesitations of about a minute each," observed Mr. Romford.

"Far the best to save him," observed Mr. Sterling, quietly; "far the best to save him—give us a good run another day."

"So it is," replied Mr. Romford; "so it is. Good foxes are becomin' very scarce—far too many Leadenhallers astir. Now, where shall we go for another draw?" asked he, thinking to try their mettle, not that he really meant to draw.

"Oh, done enough! done enough!" exclaimed several. "Leave well alone—leave well alone—capital day's sport—horses done enough—hounds done enough—all done enough."

"Well, then, which is my shortest way home?" demanded Mr. Romford, mounting his horse and casting about for a landmark.

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"Can't do better than return with me," said Mr. Stanley Sterling, "and take a snack as you pass."

"Thank'e, I've got a captin i' my pocket," replied our master, producing a great ship biscuit as he spoke; adding, "but are we still in Doubleimupshire?"

"Quite the extremity of it," replied Mr. Sterling, "quite the extremity of it. Close to what they call No Man's Land."

"No man's stop either, oi s'pose," muttered our master, thinking of the fox having got to ground in his country.

"Now, then," continued he to Chowey, who was trying to insinuate himself into Mr. Saddlebags' pocket, under pretence of a former acquaintanceship—"Now, then, let's be going." So saying, there was a general sweep of the hounds, and horses' heads were turned to the south.

"I'll show you the short way through the fields, if you'll allow me now," said Mr. Sterling, putting himself a little in advance of the pack.

"Please," said Mr. Romford, who liked soft riding.

Mr. Sterling then proceeded to pilot him along Buttercup Pasture, through Farmer Rickstone's fold-yard, up Bushblades Banks to the "Good Intent" inn, on the Woodberry Down Road. From thence an extensive view of the neighbouring country is obtained; Dozey Cathedral one way, Downley Castle another, Ritlington Clump a third.

"Now," said Mr. Sterling, pulling up short and addressing Mr. Romford—"Now, your way is along this Holly Hill Road to Harpertown—there, you see the steeple straight before you; then ask your way to the 'Fox and Hounds' at Mowlesley, and Mr. Gallon, the landlord, will direct you to Fleckney, from whence you will have no difficulty in finding your way to Beldon Hall. So now I'll bid you good day," continued Mr. Sterling, taking off his doeskin glove and tendering his hand to our master; adding, "I'll be glad to see you at my place overnight the next time you come to draw my cover;" adding, "we'll have that badger burrow fired, or made safe somehow."

"Thank ye," said Mr. Romford, joining hands—"thank ye;" adding, "I'll beat up your quarters, and we'll see if we

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can't prevent his gettin' to Constantinople another time." So saying the horses' heads diverged, under sky-scraping salutes from Chowey and Swig, Chowey telling Swig, as he unfurled his mouth with a grin, that, if he wasn't mistaken, he had seen that 'ere gent in Snoremboremshire.

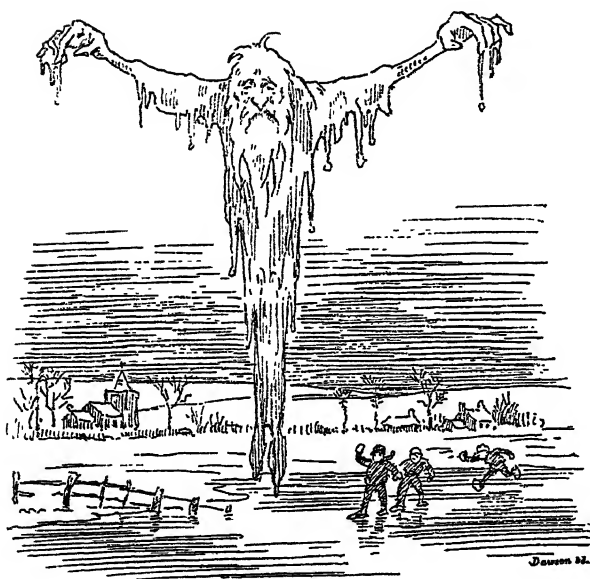
They then proceeded with a greatly reduced cavalcade, which kept further diminishing by withdrawals at various way-side houses. At length Mr. Romford and his men had the road to themselves, and our master conned over the run as he went, thinking with delight of the performance of the pack. If they were not the best in England, they were not far off, he thought.

And the badger presently looking out of his door, and seeing the coast clear, retired with a grunt to his bedroom, thinking what a punishment he had given the intruder; while the fox, taking a quiet survey from the door, also trotted leisurely off without saying "good morning," or thanking his host for his hospitality. And the fox slept that night at Rockwood Law, the next at Bowershield, and returned in due time to his old quarters in Light-thorn-rough. He didn't see any he liked better, and found that all places were more or less liable to be disturbed; Light-thorn-rough, perhaps, as little as any. So he again adopted it for better or for worse, as the saying is.

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CHAPTER XLIX.

MISS BETSEY SHANNON—MR. ROMFORD AT HOME.



Winter-time.

HE mention of mince-pies in a previous chapter will have prepared the reader for the near approach of Christmas: that festive season, when children come smiling home, with long bills in their boxes to lengthen their parents' faces; when unexpected and most-wonder-

fully-lengthened accounts come pouring in apace, and enterprising Ticks and never-dunning milliners—discarding the *persiflage* of patronage—demand their money “on or before Saturday next,” with an urgency that looks very like a near approach to bankruptcy or the workhouse. Christmas was coming!

The interchange of cupboard love was about to take place! Oyster barrels rose pyramidically on the counters, for

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transmission to the country; and cock pheasants and hares went wandering about on their first and final visit to the capital, seeking for the parties to whom they were directed. Day and night became pretty much as one, and the denizens of darkness longed for the light of the shires.

This laudable yearning was largely shared in by our before-mentioned friend, Miss Betsey Shannon, who not only sighed for the sight of

" Fresh fields and pastures new,"

but longed to see how her old friend, Lucy Glitters—afterwards Mrs. Sponge—now acted the part of Mrs. Somerville in the provinces. And as she had been useful to Mrs. Somerville, as well in rigging out her footmen as in a variety of other ways, and, moreover, knew that Lucy was not the woman to ask her down if she did not want to have her, Miss Shannon now wrote to say that, if it would be convenient to Mr. Romford and herself, she would be glad to pay them a visit at Beldon Hall. Then, as good luck would have it, the larder being pretty full, and the sport with the hounds first-rate, and Facey—perhaps, wanting some one to keep Lucy quiet when he went on his fluting excursions to Dalberry Lees, readily assented; and Lucy wrote back that they would be delighted to see Betsey down whenever she liked to come. But she said that, as they were now doing high life altogether, it would be well to abandon the name of Shannon, and adopt that of Miss Hamilton Howard for the occasion; adding, that if she wanted any clothes to support the character, she would be glad to let her have some, as, thanks to the credit of her friend, she was very well found—better, indeed, than ever she had been before.

And as Miss Shannon is now going to play a more prominent part in our story than the mere livery-hunter and commission agent of London, we will here introduce her more fully to the reader.

Miss Shannon was now just turned five-and-twenty, her birthday being on the 1st of December, though she looked

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almost younger,—an extremely healthy constitution and active habits enabling her to withstand the united effects of bad air and rouge. She had long been attached to the minor theatres and City places of public entertainment, where her broad, dashing style of pleasantry procured her many admirers among the counter-skippers and “elegant extracts” of those regions.

Altogether she was a most attractive little woman, almost a sort of red-and-white edition of our friend, Mrs. Somerville. What with her acting, her singing, her dancing, and modelling, she managed to eke out a comfortable livelihood, and pay ten shillings a week for her second-floor lodgings in Hornsey Road, Islington.

Well, Betsey was delighted when she got Lucy's letter, which she did after cutting her way home through a dense yellow fog from Highbury Barn; and she jumped and danced about the room with such emphasis, that she awoke a most respectable clerk in a no less establishment than the Bank of England itself, who thought the house was on fire, and rushed to the first floor or drawing-room window, calling frantically for an “escape.”

Having arranged matters, as well with the manager at Highbury Barn as with the proprietor of the Sir John Barleycorn Music and Dancing Saloon in Whitechapel, she presently left London, with three sovereigns in her pocket, and as light a heart in her bosom as ever accompanied fair lady into the country. And as the snorting engine swept the train out of town—passing from streets to crescents, from crescents to semi-detached villas, and from semi-detached villas to the magnificence of real ones, disclosing as it went real fields, real cows, real sheep, real barns, real everything,—her spirits rose to exuberance, and she thought she would never come back; she would rather be a dairy-maid in the country, than have to dance for her dinner in town. And as she passed from station to station, her feelings became fortified in that line. The country was the place for her.

At length, after repeated stops, hisses, and starts, our fair friend found herself before a station that, somehow or other,

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she thought she had heard of before ; and diving into her lavender-coloured kid glove, she produced a little yellow-and-white striped ticket, bearing the duplicate of the name, Firfield—"London to Firfield"—upon it.

"Oh, guard ! porter ! here ! let me out !" cried she, protruding half her person through the window ; "let me out." And forthwith a sturdy porter was at the door complying with her request.

"Noo then ! where are ye for ?" demanded a coatless, pillar-post-shaped man, with a pig-jobber-like whip in his right hand. "Noo then ! where are ye for ?"

It was Independent Jimmy asking Miss Howard where she was going.

"Beldon Hall," replied our friend in a clear, musical voice.

It was lucky that our friends at Beldon Hall had the prudence to get Miss Shannon to change her name to something more aristocratic, for if she had gone into Doubleimupshire under her proper patronymic, she would never have been noticed, and might very likely have damaged the whole Beldon Hall concern. "Betsey Shannon ! What a name !" people would have said. "What sort of people can those Romfords be, to associate with such a person ?" Then her manners, though not offensive, were rather forward, particularly with gentlemen ; and altogether she required a little toning down. This, then, she had in the much-coveted name of Howard ; for what would have been downright vulgarity in a Shannon, became the easy manners of high life with a Howard.

And as people are not easily stopped if they want a thing—the standing orders of society being quite as capable of suspension as those of the Houses of Parliament—so the fact of Mrs. Somerville not having returned any one's call did not at all prevent the same parties coming again to pay their respects to Miss Howard.

Facey, we may observe, kept the gravelled ring before the front door well raked, and could tell at a glance when there had been callers—carriage callers, or equestrian callers ; but as he could not control Miss Howard's movements, he laid it down

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as an invariable rule that callers should have nothing but sherry and ship-biscuits when they came. Sherry and ship-biscuits, he said, were delicacies enough for anybody. He had no intention of having his dinner eaten up at luncheon time by a party of ravenous callers. And sherry and ship-biscuits being more than our master allowed at first, the ladies presently improved upon his liberality by getting Mrs. Mustard to make a currant-cake as well. Then, at the gentle tinkle of the bell, old Balsam used to appear in his gaudy livery, bearing a fine silver salver studded with beautiful crystal and china accompaniments, making altogether a most respectable appearance. And as the ship-biscuits did not perceptibly diminish, and Mr. Romford cared little about the sherry—Lord Lovetin finding that—he gradually became reconciled to the ringing of his bell and the dirtying of his door-steps, so long as he himself was not personally intruded upon. Moreover, he was out hunting when the great runs upon the house took place; and the ladies having found out the trick about the gravel, generally had it raked before he came home.

And Mrs. Somerville being a good judge as to who were in earnest and who were philanderers, very soon saw that young Joe Large was very favourably disposed towards our auburn-haired friend, and therefore judiciously left them alone while she herself went about her domestic affairs, or peeped through the keyhole at them, as the case might be.

Still the boy was slow, being constantly cautioned by his mother to beware of the ladies, who, she said, had very little conscience in love affairs, and though he came pretty often, still Betsey could not report much progress. Dinners Mr. Romford would not hear of, indeed they felt conscious they could not give them; but they both thought if they could have a little evening party, at which they could appear in ball dresses, it would be very delightful, and might either secure Large or spread the net wider to catch others. Ladies generally think if they can only show themselves in costly costume, that they will be sure to captivate the men,

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though they are quite mistaken in the matter. However, let that pass.

Well, the ladies both thought it would be uncommonly nice to have a little party. Oh dear, it would be so nice to have a little evening party. So easily done, too—such a charming house, such beautiful rooms, such nice losing-places. If only Mr. Romford could be managed—oh dear, if they could only manage Mr. Romford.

And, as good luck would have it, the chance soon came. Mr. Romford's hounds had had an uncommon run from Hoyland Hill, killing in the open in Mr. Hazey's country, with only Mr. Stanley Sterling, himself, and Daniel Swig, up, the nutmeg grey having taken a violent fancy to scrubbing Chowey's leg against a carrier's cart, instead of pursuing the pleasures of the chase, making the man with the mouth vociferate vehemently. Then Facey, having made a sumptuous dinner off toad-in-the-hole and toasted cheese, proceeded to review the run, with a glass of gin and a pipe of tobacco, from the luxurious depths of an easy-chair, breaking out every now and then in ecstasies at the performance of some of the pack as satisfied Lucy that he was very well pleased with all he had done. Then she looked at Betsey, and Betsey looked at Facey, and, seeing his humour, Betsey arose, and going to the piano, began to play his favourite air, "Jump Jim Crow." Facey was delighted: "Jim Crow" and "Old Bob Ridley" he looked upon as the two finest efforts of the imagination, and after Miss Shannon had played "Crow" over to him three times, he went for his flute and proceeded to accompany her.

Then came the "leperous distilment" as per previous arrangement between Lucy and Betsey.

"How nice it would be to have a little music here some evening," observed Miss Shannon, sipping her sherry negus.

"Wouldn't it!" exclaimed Lucy, as though the idea had just struck her.

"Such a nice house, and so well adapted for a thing of the sort," continued Betsey.

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"Well, but we've had a little music," observed Facey, scrutinising them attentively; adding, "what more would you have?"

"Oh, yes, we have had music. very nice music," replied Miss Shannon gaily; "but rather in a selfish sort of way, you know; what I meant was, to let other people hear us—'Mrs. Somerville at home,' or something of that sort, you know."

"'Mrs. Somerville at home,'" repeated Facey—"what does that mean? Why, you're always at home, ain't you, when you're not out, ain't ye?"

"Oh, yes, but it doesn't mean that," rejoined Lucy. "It means at home to receive visitors. It means dressing up; but then there's no occasion for you to do so. You needn't dress up unless you like."

"Humph!" mused Facey, resuming his pipe, to consider how that would act. "Well, but is it a cock-and-hen club? I mean, are gentlemen asked as well as ladies, or is it only a lady party?"

"Oh, certainly, a few men—couldn't have a party without them, you know."

"And do ye give them anything?" asked he.

"Oh, just a little tea and coffee," replied Lucy.

"Tea and coffee," repeated Facey, thinking that would not do much for him.

"P'raps a sandwich and a glass of sherry before they go away," added she.

"Sandwich and a glass of sherry," muttered Facey—"sandwiches and a glass of sherry," repeated he, thinking the latter would not cost anything. "Might have a rabbit-poie and a cheese," suggested he, thinking they would be cheaper than ham-sandwiches.

"Oh, but people don't eat cheese of an evening," replied Lucy—"only light things—confectionery, and such like."

"Humph! good things at any time, I think," replied Romford, who was a great man for cheese—good, stiff, leathery sort of stuff he used to indulge in too.

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“And what do you do then?” asked he.

“Oh, just look at each other and talk—ask Mrs. Brown if she’s seen Mrs. Green, or Mr. Black if he’s heard from Mr. White lately.”

“What next?” asked Mr. Romford.

“Oh, well then, when you’ve got a good boiling you begin to let them simmer off to cards or something. Perhaps the best way will be to begin with a little music—Mr. Romford and you can open with ‘Old Bob Ridley,’ or any other tune; then you, Betsey, can accompany yourself on the guitar, after which we could begin to pair people off to play and sing together, or let them wander about the house and do as they like.”

“Don’t let them go into my bed-room!” exclaimed Facey, who had no fancy for having his valuable wardrobe or expensive toilette table exposed.

“Oh, no, lock the door,” replied Lucy—“lock the door—lock all places up that we don’t mean them to go into.”

“And you’re sure they won’t make me make a speech, or anything of that sort?” inquired Facey anxiously.

“Oh, no,” replied Lucy, “nothing of that sort—quite a free-and-easy—a ladies’ entertainment, in short. The master of the house may wander about just as if he were one of the guests.”

“Well, then, oi’ll wander off to bed,” said Facey, rising and lighting himself a candle, observing to Lucy, as he shook hands with her, “oi think you’d better consider about the rabbit-poie and the cheese—come cheaper than ham, oi’m sure.” So saying, he rolled out of the room. And as the door closed, and his slip-shod feet were heard retreating along the passage, the ladies rose from their chairs, clapping their hands and jumping for joy at the idea of having an “AT HOME.” They were perfectly astonished at their own success. Never thought our Master would come in so easily. They little thought how much he was influenced by the idea of the fair lisper at Dalberry Lees forming one of the little musical party. The ladies then thought they had better clench the consent by sending out a few invitations; and opening a packet of “at home” cards

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that they had providentially had engraved and sent down by book-post from London, they commenced filling in the names—

Mr. Bonus,

MRS. SOMERVILLE,

“AT HOME,”

Tuesday the 11th, Nine o’Clock,

“R. S. V. P.”

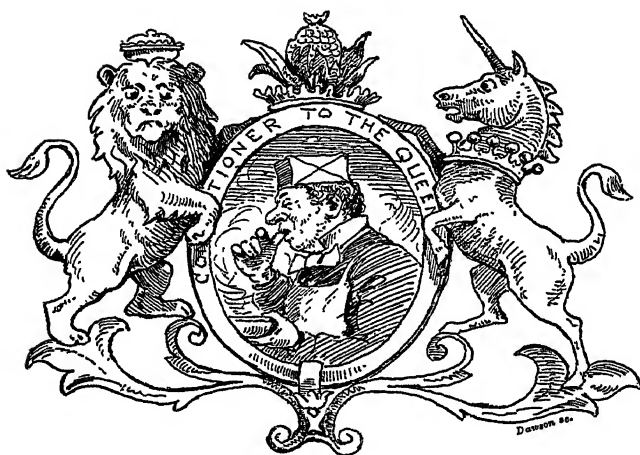
BELDON HALL.

—to the extent of some ten or a dozen, which they enclosed in superfine envelopes, sealed with the “Turbot-on-its-tail” seal, and told Dirtiest of the Dirty to take them to the lodge to meet the pedestrian postman in the morning. This done, they retired to rest, Betsey dreaming that she brought young Large to book before they had got half through the evening, when other gentlemen came pouring in apace, until she was perfectly overwhelmed with offers. Mrs. Somerville, too, having then recently received a copy of Crow’s “Illustrated Manual of Mourning Fashion,” dreamt that she was so captivating in a Clotilde tulle evening dress, with its diamond-shaped bouillons, crossed with straps of satin, that she wrote off and ordered one the next morning without further to-do, and also a rich Zingaree Lyons velvet cloak for Miss Hamilton Howard, both, of course, to be sent to the care of the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Lovetin, Beldon Hall, Doubleimupshire.

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CHAPTER L.

MR. FIZZER, CONFECTIONER TO THE QUEEN.



"Confectioner to the Queen."

IT was a good arrangement of Mrs. Somerville's pitching her party to the key-note of an "At home," they are at once such elastic and compressible entertainments. If nobody came, she was still

"At home"; if half the county came, she was there also. An "At home" may mean anything—anything except a dinner. It may be merely a conjurer, it may be a magic lantern, it may be tea and turn out, it may be tea and Terpsichore, it may be a carpet dance, it may be a quiet evening and a little music, or it may be a ball and supper. It pledges itself to nothing. Still, it has this inconvenience, that unless an answer is specifically requested through the medium of those talismanic letters "R. S. V. P.," half the recipients of cards don't answer them, thinking it just a sort of open thing to be gone to or not as they feel inclined on the evening of the day. The absence of the

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letters is rather indicative of its not making much matter whether the guest comes or not. Mrs. Somerville, therefore, obviated this by having the "R. S. V. P." on her invitations, which, coupled with the novelty of anything being given at Beldon Hall, caused a great sensation throughout the country. There was no fear of any refusals, or of the invitations not being responded to. There was no hunting in Burke or Hart's Army List, to see who Mrs. Somerville was—everything was taken for granted. As soon as the first surprise had subsided, the note paper was produced, and the answers becomingly arranged. Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Large, and Mr. J. Bolingbroke Large, had the honour of accepting Mrs. Somerville's polite invitation, &c. Mr. and Mrs. Hazey, Miss Hazey, and Mr. William Hazey, had much pleasure, &c., Miss Hazey thinking the party was made for her. Mr. and Mrs. Watkins, and Miss Watkins, had great pleasure, &c., Miss nothing doubting that the party was made for her.

Others followed quickly, the Blantons, the Pyefinches, the Cramberledges, the Ellerbys, the Baker-Bensons, the Brogdales, the Bigmores, all coming, and some asking to be allowed to bring friends, Mrs. Dust pleading for a nephew, Mrs. Lolly asking for the addition of a lady. Then out went more cards, and more cards still, in such numbers that if Mrs. Somerville had not done old Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent. out of a hundred pounds' worth of shares in the Half-Guinea Hat Company, the outlay for postage stamps would have been rather inconvenient. Then came the consideration of feeding the multitude.

Old Dirty could roast and boil, but as to anything like ornamental dishes, still less confectionery, it was wholly and totally out of the question. She candidly said she couldn't do it. She, however, half solved the difficulty by suggesting that her friend Mrs. Carraway, the confectioner of Hardingford, could be had over for a few days, who would be able to set out a supper fit for a prince to partake of.

"That old thing," said Betsey to Mrs. Somerville, "may be all very well in her way, but I should doubt very much her being able to set out anything superior, and in all probability

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she will charge you quite as much for a tenth-rate thing as a good confectioner would for a first ; so why not have a first-rate one, and enjoy the credit of it ? ”

“ Well,” replied Mrs. Somerville, “ there’s something in that ; only,” added she, after a pause, “ where is one to get the superior article ? ”

“ London, to be sure,” rejoined Betsey ; “ London’s the place to get everything. Get lions, tigers, unicorns, elephants, temples, pagodas, palaces,—all the skill and beauty of the most practised hands in each department of the sugary art.”

“ Ah, but how about Mr. Romford ? ” sighed Mrs. Somerville.

“ Ah, Mr. Romford, indeed ! ” ejaculated Betsey, recollecting his rabbit-pie-and-cheese proposal. “ Well, that is a difficulty,” added she. “ Couldn’t make him believe that old Dirty had made them, could we ? ” asked she, after a pause.

“ Oh, no ; he’s far too sharp for that,” replied Mrs. Somerville. “ Knows every ounce of everything that comes into the house, and everything that goes out of it, too. One would think he had nothing a year, paid quarterly, instead of thirty thousand from land, and I don’t know what from other sources.”

“ You don’t say so ! ” exclaimed Betsey, who hadn’t heard of such money. “ Well, but if it didn’t cost him anything he wouldn’t mind, perhaps, would he ? ” suggested Miss Shannon.

“ Well, I don’t know that he would,” replied Mrs. Somerville ; “ but the thing is how to do it.”

“ I think I have it,” replied Miss Shannon.

“ How ? ” asked Mrs. Somerville.

“ Well, then, you see, as we are only lodgers, as the Irishman said when they told him the house was on fire, I think we may as well make hay while the sun shines ; and with my fine new name and aristocratic connections, there can be no difficulty in my ordering whatever we like, and telling Mr. Romford that I stand Sam for the occasion.”

“ No more there will ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Somerville, delighted at the proposal.

“ Have the things directed to me, you know—‘ Miss Hamilton

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Howard, or Mrs. Hamilton Howard, Beldon Hall, Doubleim-upshire.' ”

“Capital ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Somerville, clapping her pretty taper-fingered hands ; “excellent, indeed. But we had better have in the Lovetin title, or they may take us for some of the smaller fry, and hesitate to execute the order.”

“Well, I'd have it in mildly, then,” replied Miss Shannon. “Say, ‘at the Lord Lovetin’s, Beldon Hall, Doubleimupshire ;’ not ‘at the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Lovetin’s, Beldon Hall, Doubleimupshire,’ or they may think we are vulgar people unaccustomed to the nobility. They’ll soon refer to the Peerage, if they have any doubts, and give him all his honours themselves.”

“Then who should we give our valuable custom to ? ” asked Mrs. Somerville.

“Oh, Fizzer, by all means. Fizzer has unlimited means, and can execute the largest order off-hand with the greatest ease. I know one of his genteel young people, who says they do business in the most liberal, confiding way,—never suspecting anybody with a handle to his name, or seeming to think it possible to be imposed upon.”

“That’s the man for us ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Somerville.

They then discussed the form of the Fizzer order.

“‘Miss Hamilton Howard presents her compliments to Mr. Fizzer,’ ” suggested Lucy.

“No, I wouldn’t compliment him,” replied Miss Shannon. “Too polite ; might make him suspicious. Just write as you would to your milliner, in a scrawly-sprawly sort of way, saying what you want, and nothing more ; leaving him a little margin for the imagination to play upon, and to enable him to suggest something himself. He may propose to supply wine too ; in which case you would take him at his word, and save Mr. Romford’s, who, you know, only agreed to give sherry.”

And Lucy, who was a much better writer than Betsey, whose *forte* lay more in her toes than her fingers, then proceeded to order a champagne supper for eighty or ninety ladies and gentlemen, to be sent to Miss Hamilton Howard, at Beldon

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Hall, in Doubleimupshire, on the 11th, by the train that arrived at the Firfield station at 1.30 p.m.

The next post brought down a gilt-edged extra superfine note, with the words, "Fizzer, Confectioner to the Queen," on the pink stamp of the envelope, informing Miss Hamilton Howard that her esteemed favour had come to hand and should be duly attended to, adding, that if there was any extra plate or waiters, or anything else required, perhaps Miss Hamilton Howard would have the goodness to communicate her wishes to Mr. Fizzer; thus showing how grateful London tradespeople are for being handsomely imposed upon. And the note concluded by requesting a continuance of Miss Hamilton Howard's favours, which should at all times command Fizzer's best attention.

So far so good. They had now got supper, plate, and extra servants if they wanted them. The minor adjuncts only remained. Lucy was now in her glory.

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CHAPTER LI.

MRS. SOMERVILLE "AT HOME."



FORTUNE favours the brave; and the ladies at Beldon Hall seemed to be particularly lucky, for a bright sunny day went down with a blood-red sky, giving goodly promise for the coming frosty night. And indeed, before Mr. Romford reached his kennel, after a fairish run in the lower part of Doubleimupshire, the ice began to crumble beneath his horse's hoofs, and the air assumed a crisp consistency that as good as said, "Mr. Francis Romford, my good friend, your invincible hounds will not be out again in a hurry." Nor in truth did our Master care much if he stopped for a while and took stock, for several of his subscribers paid the usual convenient tribute of respect to his great riches by withholding their subscriptions, and Facey would like to have them collected. How could he ever build his hospital if they didn't pay? In addition to this, he had two or three lame horses, besides some that were getting rather light in the girth; and as Mr. Goodhearted Green had expressed his intention of being in Mr. Romford's "shire," as he called it, towards Christmas, Facey would like to have them plumped out a little before Goodheart came. So he resigned his horse to the strong persevering man, and fed his hounds without note or comment on the future. Two things Facey eschewed—hunting in wind and a frost; and he saw plainly enough that he was in for the latter. He therefore resolved to succumb without contending with the elements—a step that it would be well if other masters were to adopt. With feelings such as

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these, he now waddled down to the house at a sort of half-running-half-walking kind of gait.

The first thing that struck our Master, as he approached the Hall, was the disordered state of the gravelled ring before the door. When he left home in the morning it was nicely raked, but now there were the marks of two if not three carriages upon it. "Rot it!" exclaimed he, "they'll never be done with their callers continually battledoring and shuttlecocking the cards," thinking what a consumption of sherry and captains there would have been. "Straw, too!" added he, as he advanced farther and found a few blades, also some paper shavings. "What the deuce are they doing with straw?" Facey little thinking what two cargoes of goods Independent Jimmy had brought from the Firfield station, from Mr. Fizzer's. But when he opened the door, and found a fire blazing on either side of the great entrance-hall, his consternation knew no bounds, and he thought the quiet evening and a little music had indeed assumed vast proportions. There are, however, people who will attempt to carry off anything with a matter-of-course air, and by going boldly in they oftentimes parry, or at all events break, the force of a blow. When, therefore, Mr. Romford came striding into the breakfast-room, nursing his wrath as he walked, Miss Betsey Shannon essayed to take the wind out of his sails by exclaiming, "Oh, Mr. Romford! Oh, Mr. Romford! haven't we made an improvement in the hatmosphere of the 'ouse?"

"Made two great blazing fires, I see," replied Facey, gruffly; adding, "but I don't know that that will be any improvement in my pocket."

"Oh, but it's worth all the money," rejoined Miss Shannon, "especially on a cold frosty night like this; and when, too, you have a few friends coming to take tea and spend the evening with you."

"Well, well," rejoined Mr. Romford; "but there's reason in all things—reason in all things. No use making two fires when one would do. Folks can warm themselves just as well at one fire as at two. And who's been at the biscuits?" demanded he, reverting to his original gravel grievance.

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"Nobody," replied Lucy, boldly.

"*Nobody!*" retorted Facey. "Coom, that won't do; bin two, if not three carriages here, oi'll swear."

"Oh, that's Independent Jimmy with—with——" faltered Mrs. Somerville.

"With what?" demanded Facey.

"Oh, just some things for Miss Shannon," replied the lady, recollecting herself.

"Things for Miss Shannon!" retorted Facey. "Why, he must have brought half creation."

"You see, now," interposed Betsey, playfully taking him by the button of his red coat as she spoke,—“you see I've a cousin in the confectionery line, and he has lent us some little sugar ornaments and things to set the supper table out with.”

Facey.—"Supper table! Why, I thought we settled there was to be a rabbit-pie and some cheese—I mean sherry and sandwiches?"

Miss Shannon.—"Oh, yes—sherry and sandwiches, too; but you know these are just ornamental things, not meant to eat, you know; and as my cousin offered them, why, we thought we might as well have them, specially as they cost nothing."

"Cost Independent Jimmy's journeys, at all events," replied Mr. Romford, thinking what a lot of rabbit-pies the money would have bought. However, as he couldn't say Miss Shannon might not do as she liked with her own, he turned the conversation by exclaiming to Lucy, "And what's there for dinner, lass?"

"Resurrection pie and roast apples," replied Lucy.

"Resurrection pie and roast apples," repeated Facey, adding, "well, let's be at it as soon as you like, for oi'm very hungry and ready to be doing."

"They'll be ready as soon as you are," replied Lucy, glad to see he was inclined to expedite matters, adding, "p'r'aps you won't mind taking your pipe in the bedroom?"

"What for?" demanded Facey.

"Oh, only because we should like to have this room for a cloak-room."

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"Cloak-room!" replied Facey; "why the deuce can't they put off their cloaks in the hall? What are the two great rousing fires for, I wonder?" asked he, reverting to the old grievance.

"Oh, but then the ladies must have combs, and pins, and looking-glasses, to arrange their hair and simpers," observed Miss Shannon, coming to the rescue.

"Dash them! they surely don't mean to dress their hair here?" replied Facey.

"No, but then to see it's all right after the jolt of the road, you know."

"Gentlemen don't understand these things, you see," added Miss Shannon.

"Don't oi?" growled Facey, as if he understood a good deal more than she thought. He then rolled out of the room, wondering what the deuce the women were after—why they couldn't have a few friends to tea without all that kick up.

It was only an uncomfortable meal as far as Lucy and Betsey were concerned, for they were anxious to expedite matters, and durst not open their mouths on the subject of the coming entertainment; while Facey seemed to dawdle over his dinner, a most unusual circumstance with him, who generally gobbled it up like a hound. If he only knew how anxious they were to get rid of him, he surely would be good enough to go. Oh dear, what a deal they had to do! And there! he was taking another slice of cheese. At length he gave his great mouth such a sounding smack as indicated he was done, and, turning short round to the fire, he stuck out his legs as if preparing for his pipe. Lucy then rang the bell for Dirtiest of the Dirty, and as she cleared the things away, Lucy took advantage of a lull in the noise to ask if Mr. Romford's fire was burning.

"Yes, mum," replied Dirty.

"Hang these 'at homes,'" growled Facey; "they seem to make a man not at home. Light me a candle," added he, seeing there was no help for it. He then rose and slouched off in his slippers, muttering something as he went about "women and the price of coals."

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"Thank goodness, he's gone!" exclaimed Betsey, almost as soon as he had closed the door.

"Hush!" rejoined Lucy; "you don't know what quick ears he has. Now he *is* away," added she, as she heard him turn up the passage leading to his bedroom. The ladies then laid their heads together to expedite matters—so much to do, and so little time to do it in. The fact was, Facey should not have had any dinner at home that day. And to aggravate matters, there came notes from parties begging, as the greatest possible favour, to be allowed to bring others, or exchange samples, with the weary bearers waiting for answers, and of course retarding matters down below.

Eight o'clock now struck—quicker, if possible, and more impulsively than usual—and it wanted but an hour, one short hour, until the grand company would be entitled to come: and there is always some stupid gawk who arrives at the exact moment, doing as much mischief as a score of people would do. But, thanks to Mr. Percival Pattycake, Mr. Fizzer's head man, things were well forward, which they would have had little chance of being, if the Dirties had been in command, for they were all so bent on admiring themselves in their well-distended white muslin dresses, with cherry-colour sashes and little jaunty caps, as to be perfectly forgetful of the fact that they were meant to do anything but giggle and amuse themselves.

Very pretty they all were, though Dirtiest of the Dirty was decidedly the belle of the party, with her sylph-like figure, large languishing eyes, pearly teeth, and beautiful hands. She, however, felt rather hurt that, as a lady's maid, she was not allowed to wear a low-necked dress. "There should be a distinction made," she said, "in favour of upper servants."

Billy Balsam and Bob Short, too, got into their shorts in good time; and Billy was so disguised by his powdered head and gaudy livery, that none of the Lonnergan family—not even old "Rent-should-never rise" himself—recognised him.

But the great metamorphosis of the evening was that of our gigantic friend Proudlock, the keeper, whom Lucy had induced to put on a splendid green-and-gold French chasseur's uniform

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that Betsey had got down from the same unhappy hook-nose who supplied the liveries. There, with defiant false moustaches and a lofty feather-plumed cocked hat, Proudlock stood at the front door, receiving the carriages as they came up, striking awe and astonishment into the minds of the beholders.

One thing, to be sure, had been omitted in the arrangements, namely, to provide stable-room for the horses and refreshments for the servants. And as carriage after carriage set down, with the usual inquiry of the giant where they were to put up, the coachmen were told that he didn't know anything about putting up. Indeed, it never seemed to have occurred to the ladies that they would want anything of the sort. "As strong as a horse," is a familiar phrase; and what did it mean but the power of resisting hunger and cold. Besides, how did the cab-horses and things do in London? Who, in the midst of preparations like these, could think of such things? "Drive on!" was therefore the order of the day. And now let us look at matters inside the house.

The two ladies dressed together, taking an hour and a half for the operation, at the end of which time they severally appeared in very chaste and elegant costume.

Let us now suppose them down-stairs, all ready for the ring-up of the curtain of company.

Hark! it's evidently a frosty night, for the notes of the stable clock reverberate through the house as though it were inside the mansion. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, *nine* o'clock! Mrs. Somerville "at home" at nine o'clock, and now she's due! Then, having snatched a parting glance at herself in the mirror, and feeling comfortable on the score of looks, she takes her delicate white kid gloves and richly embroidered feathered fan off the mantelpiece, and approaches the door of the reception-room, accompanied by Miss Hamilton Howard, each inwardly hoping that Mr. Romford will be pacific under the violent surprise that awaits him,—the blaze of light, the great gathering, the gorgeous supper, the—we don't know what else besides.

Hark, again! Carriage-wheels sound on the now frozen



"DASH MY BUTTONS!"

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gravel, and yet it's only five minutes past nine. The noise ceases, but the momentary calm is only the prelude to a most boisterous ring.

A country footboy has got the brass bell-knob in his hand, and pulls as if he were going to pocket it for his trouble. A tremendous peal is the result. It shakes the nerves of everybody in the house,—Dirties, Lucy, Facey, and all.

"There! there's somebody!" ejaculated Lucy and Betsey, as they both got into position, Lucy before the door, Betsey a *leetle* behind, ready to advance as soon as Mrs. Somerville's smiling demands were satisfied in full.

"Dash my buttons, here they come!" exclaimed Facey aloud to himself, now in the last throes of his neckcloth. "Dash my buttons, here they come! and I not half dressed yet. Shouldn't wonder if it's Cass herself," said he, thinking how she would pout if he was not ready to "Bob Ridley" her.

But he is all out in his reckoning. Cassandra Cleopatra, at this identical moment, is getting laced into a most elegant *toilette* of straw-coloured *Chambéry* gauze with six flounces of white *tulle*; and Spanker's man is just putting the harness on to the carriage-horses, to convey them to Beldon Hall.

No; it is the noble family of Lonnergan,—Lord Lonnergan of Flush House, accompanied by his amiable wife and accomplished daughters, who, however, have not been able to persuade papa that there is no occasion to come to the exact moment they are asked for. His lordship insists upon the contrary; adding, that he once missed the mail train in consequence of being half a minute behind time, and he has always made a point of being punctual ever since. So he confronts the gigantic Proudlock, who passes the party on to the figure-footmen, who in turn conduct the ladies to the breakfast-room door, where the sylph-like form of Dirtiest of the Dirty, now arrayed in white muslin with bright cherry-coloured ribbons, receives them; and his blue-coated, short-breeched lordship is ushered into the library, where the other Miss Dirties, similarly attired, preside behind a well-garnished tea and coffee table. These beautiful girls his innocent lordship

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surveys with all the respect that old Don Quixote regarded the muleteer's wenches ; thinking, if not princesses, that at all events they were Mrs. Somerville's servants. But he declines both tea and coffee, having had both before.

And now the Honourable Lovetin Lonnergan, who had come on the box of the carriage, having got out of his wraps and joined the ladies, summoning the old lord from his survey, advances up the passage to the radiant music-room, preceded by both Balsam and Short.

"Mr. and Mrs. Lonnergan and the Misses Lonnergan—Mr. Lovetin Lonnergan," announces Billy Balsam in the orthodox way he had been taught ; and forthwith there was a great bending and bobbing and showing of teeth, with introductions to "my friend, Miss Hamilton Howard." And both his lordship and the honourable were much struck with the ladies' beauty.

Ring, ring, ring, went the door-bell, and the giant was again astonishing the arrivals : Mr. and Mrs. Brogdale and Miss Brogdale this time, closely followed by Romford's suspicious friend Miss Mouser, who did not let any doubts she had upon our master's genuineness prevent her begging Mrs. Watkins to get her an invitation to his house. Then came the Blantons and Mr. Finch, the gentleman our master called Mr. Felt.

And now, Mr. Romford having descended from his bedroom, arrayed in all the magnificence of purple and fine linen, with a smart cambric kerchief in his hand in lieu of his old snuff-coloured bandana, found a cluster of ladies and gentlemen around our fair friends, quite as many as, with a slight addition perhaps, Facey thought would constitute a party—quite as many, at least, as he expected to be asked when he gave his consent to have one. Who the deuce was going to find sherry and sandwiches for the whole county ? But still Billy Balsam kept piloting in more, mangling their names, and sometimes exchanging them altogether when he had two sets in hand, calling Mr. Tuckwell Mr. Brotherton, and Mr. Brotherton Mr. Brown, in the most arbitrary and uncharitable

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way. The carriages now came so quickly that the bell ceased ringing, and Billy had hardly time to receive one consignment from Bob Short and pass them to the Dirties, ere another party wanted to be passed from the Dirties to the music-room. Not so our fat friend from Pickering Nook, who seemed to think he had got among the fair damsels at the refreshment-room there, and kept laughing and talking, or rather squeaking, first with one Dirty and then with another, as though he were going to stay there.

But here comes the weasel-looking chairman of the Half-Guinea Hat Company, with his yellow-and-white beard carefully combed out, and his falling crop of sandy hair made the most of towards the top. He grins as though he has quite recovered from his "cat"-spelling loss at Tarring Neville, and was easy about the hundred pounds' worth of hat-shares Lucy had got. The fact is, he has just made a great hit in buying a piece of land with a favourite clump of trees upon it, which he threatened to cut down unless certain parties paid for their standing, and amongst them he has got three times as much as he gave.

"MISTER, MISTRESS, and MISS WATKINS!" now announced the Dalberry Lees' figure-footman in a loud authoritative tone at the front door, as though he were telling the giant something he didn't know. Mister, Mistress, and Miss Watkins had indeed come at last; and now, getting out of their opossum and black bear-skin wrappers, they descend slowly and deliberately from the well-appointed carriage, as though they did not care who they kept waiting behind. Having seen them into the middle of the entrance-hall, the coachman then further procrastinates matters by demanding to know where he is to put up his 'osses. On being told by the giant that he knows nothin' about 'osses, he indulges in some coarse invectives against the 'ouse generally, and with a vindictive cut of his whip at length moves on from the door. Mr. Lolly's one-'oss-shay then crawls up. Then came the Kickons, the Bigmores, and a gentleman in a gig. Meanwhile the ladies, having dropped Willy at the tea-room door, proceed under the

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guidance of the two figure-footmen to the cloak-room, where they remove the last wrap that conceals the artistic triumph of Madame La Modiste. Miss, indeed, looks well.

The Watkinses declining tea, which indeed they had taken before they left Dalberry Lees, proceeded, duly heralded by Balsam and Short, to the reception-room, about the centre of which, and as nearly under the richly-cut glass chandelier as would escape any wax-drops falling on her dress or beautifully rounded shoulders, stood Mrs. Somerville in the full blaze of light and admiration, receiving the compliments of the men, and undergoing the scrutiny of the ladies.

There too, a little on her left, was Betsey Shannon, now, of course, Miss Hamilton Howard, the centre of attraction to three young gentlemen at once, viz., Bolingbroke Large, Sick-mouth, and the Honourable Lovetin Lonnergan. But Betsey had *esprit*, or what she called chaff, for them all, and played her cards so well that each fancied himself the favourite, and wondered why the others didn't go away. She had held six men in tow at Highbury Barn before now, to say nothing of a fiddler and the cornet-à-piston in the orchestra. So she smiled and laughed and twisted and turned to show herself off to the greatest advantage.

And now the concentrated gaze of the room is diverted from the new-comers towards our great master, Mr. Romford, to see how he greets the reputed new mistress of Beldon Hall. Miss Mouser up with her glass, for hers was the eye that never missed the shadow of an ogle or the echo of a sigh. Mrs. Brogdale put on her spectacles, and Mrs. Bigmore her nose-glasses. On Romford comes like a great wave of the sea, until he reaches the reef of the family party. Then Mrs., then Miss, then Mr. have him alternately by the hand. Miss is very smiling, for she now feels assured that the whole affair is in honour of her. He wants to show her the house to advantage, before he asks her to share it with him. Miss Mouser says, with a dig of her sharp elbow into Mr. Blanton's ribs, "There's something in it, I'm sure." She then shifts her place and proceeds to take a sidelong survey—"Clearly

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something in it," she says to herself, as she watches the sparkle of the lisper's eye. But her triumph was of short duration.

"MR., MRS., AND MISS HAZEY, AND MR. WILLIAM HAZEY!" now announces Mr. William Balsam, piloting the party well up to the mistress. Then there was a fresh ebullition of feeling, more smiles, more bows, more curtsies, more shakes of the hand. Miss looks lovely, quite eclipsing Miss Watkins both in beauty and dress.

Miss Mouser is at her with her formidable glass, for she doesn't like her mother—Mrs. Bigmore is at her with her double ones, for she doesn't like her father; and Miss Watkins is at her with her supercilious eyes, for she doesn't like herself. A good many others, too, gave her saucy stares, for she was far too pretty to be popular, and Mr. Hazey himself was not much liked either. Mr. Romford, however, consoles her for all the curling lips by the fervour of his greeting, quite satisfying Miss Hazey that the party was for her, and her only. If Cassandra Cleopatra could have felt the pressure of his great hand, she would have thought little of her own chance of preferment. But our lisping friend is not going to surrender without a struggle, and watching her opportunity, she sidles up to our host, and asks, with a glance at the piano, if they are not going to have a little music.

"Oh, to be sure!" exclaimed Facey, now recollecting what the party was for—"oh, to be sure! Oi'll get moy flute, and we will 'stonish the natives together."

"Your flute is in the music-stand," now exclaimed Mrs. Somerville, who had been listening to the rivals, and feared lest Facey might go out of the room and upset all the other arrangements.

"Is it?" said Romford, "then let us be doing," offering as he spoke his red arm to Cassandra, who joyfully accepted it, flaunting her dress at Miss Hazey just as a peacock flaunts his tail when he's not upon over good terms with the hen.

Then there was fresh nudging and looking and hushing, and whispering of "What's up now? Going to have a little music, are we? What, a concert, is it?" with mutterings of

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"Oh, *she* can't play a bit, nor he either," as the two approached the piano.

Miss Cassandra now draws off her closely-fitting white kid gloves, and depositing them with her fine lace and ciphered kerchief at the corner of the instrument, takes her voluminous seat on the stool, while Mr. Romford screws his old flute together, and amid hissing and hushing the audience form a semicircle behind, preparing for the punishment; and Mrs. Somerville stands on guard near the door to receive the fresh comers, closely attended by Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent., chairman of the Half-Guinea Hat Company, with Betsey and her beaux for a vanguard behind.

And now Mr. Romford, having got his greasy old instrument licked and sucked and put together, proceeds to blow a few discordant puffs and squeaks, while the fair lady runs her light hand up and down the notes of the piano, as if to test the quality of her consignment. All being at length ready, with renewed cries of "hish, hush," the sound of voices gradually subsides, and as the now attracted company are expecting some fine Italian air, away the musicians go with Facey's favourite tune of "Old Bob Ridley."

"Why, what tune's that?" whispers one.

"Don't know," mutters another.

"Surely it's not 'Old Bob Ridley,'" says a third.

"Believe it is," adds a fourth.

"Hush!" cries a fifth.

If Facey's Oncle Gilroy really damaged his wind by making him play the flute to him when a boy, he had a great deal to answer for, as we make no doubt the assembled company thought, for a more impotent exhibition was perhaps never heard, even though Cassandra Cleopatra did halt and help him along over the weak places, instead of hurrying on and showing off on her own account.

Still the lameness of the performance did not prevent the assiduous toadies expressing their gratification and thanks to them both when they were done, even though they inwardly hoped they might not have to undergo any more of such music.

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But Facey, who had a firm conviction that he had mistaken his calling, and ought to have been a flutist, received it all as well-merited laudation, and as soon as he had sufficiently recovered his wind, whispered to Cassandra, "Now let's 'stonish them with 'Dixey's Land.'"

And Miss gladly obeyed, much to the comfort of some and the disquietude of others; and away they went more briskly than before.

During all this time the guests still kept arriving, Mr. Telford, Mr. Stoddart, Mr. and Mrs. Pinker bringing Miss Reevey, and Mr. Baxton his two daughters and a gawky nephew, and when Facey turned round he was astonished to find such an assemblage. There could not be less than sixty or seventy people in the room, and Sweet William still kept piloting in more, Bowman and Barker and Lightfoot and Lorington, and we don't know who else besides.

"Well, the ways of the women are wonderful," muttered Romford, surveying the gathering, thinking he would not be caught giving his consent for another quiet evening with a little music. Then the question where the sandwiches were to come from struck like a dagger to his heart. "Where, indeed," thought he. "A 'underd and fifty people at least," mused he, glancing round the room. "Terrible field, indeed."

But Cassandra did not give him much time for reflection, for, knowing the power of her rival, she arose, and placing her delicate white arm within his red one, she lisped in his ear, "Now take me to the tea-room," determined that he should not be charmed by her music, at all events.

"Tea-room!" muttered Facey; adding, "I don't think there is one."

"Oh yes, there is," rejoined Miss Cassandra, piloting him into the thick of the crowd,—“Oh, yes, there is;” adding, “your people offered us some when we came.”

And as she worked him on, they came upon the breakwater formed before the door, now shored up behind by the substantial figures of "Rent-should-never-rise," Mrs. and the Miss Rents, Fatty Stotfold, and other stout ones.

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Then, having at length penetrated this apparently impervious phalanx, they came upon where the enterprising ladies were receiving at once their guests and the homage due to their own distinguished beauty; and Mrs. Somerville, looking round, confronted the tall figure of her brother shouldering his way, with Cassandra Cleopatra clinging affectionately to his side.

"Oh, where are you going, my dear?" exclaimed she, anxiously, laying her hand on his arm.

"*Tea!* Where's the tea?" muttered Facey.

"*Tea!*—there'll be——" Here Mrs. Somerville faltered; she would have said sandwiches, but she felt it was of no use further disguising the matter, so she substituted the word "refreshment;" adding, "and I want you to take in a lady."

"Humph!" growled Romford, wondering what was up; muttering down his arm to his fair friend, "you'll get some gruel presently."

So Miss Cassandra was impounded—impounded, too, in the most unpleasant way: for Anna Maria, availing herself of the familiar artifice peculiar to orators and gentlemen troubled with a determination of words to the mouth, got up a call on herself for some music, which, after a certain amount of coyness, she acceded to, and was presently playing and warbling in the place of her predecessor. It is but justice, however, to Cassandra, to state that she talked as loud and made as much noise as ever she could; and as it is easier to find fault than to do better, she criticised Anna Maria's performance very severely.

At length the music ceased, thanks were tendered, curtesy made, and all parties began to think it was time for something else.

Mrs. Somerville then braced herself up to the utmost, and approaching our master, asked him to take Mrs. Hazey into the dining-room.

"Dinin'-room!" muttered Facey, who thought the thing would be done on a tray where they were. He then did as he was bid, muttering as he went, "What's up now, as the frog said when its tail dropped off."

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CHAPTER LII.

MRS. SOMERVILLE'S SANDWICHES.



HE left our friend Mr. Romford piloting one of his expectant mothers-in-law along from the music to the refreshment room, under a mixed effusion of compliments from her, and speculations of his own as to what was going to happen next.

Mrs. Hazey was now satisfied—indeed, revenged. She saw how it was: Mr. Romford was civil to Mrs. Watkins, but marked in his attention to her. It was clear the party was made for them (the Hazeyes), though the Watkinses thought to appropriate it. That silly conceited girl (Cassandra Cleopatra) was always trying to make other women believe that the men were in love with her.

They now got to the door of the lofty “forty by thirty” dining-room, resplendent with light, glitter, and glare. Along three-quarters of its entire length, flanked in at the ends, was arranged a most sumptuous supper-table, interspersed with beautiful fruit and flower vases, alternating with the most exquisite confectionery.

Before the elegant young gentleman in black, with the costly jewellery on his vest, and his curly dark hair parted elegantly down the middle, stood a noble design of the royal arms—a perfect trophy—the whiteness of the sugar lions being relieved by the rich colour and gilding of the numerous flags and arms.

Half-way down, on Pattycake’s right, arose a grand memorial of our Indian Empire, in the shape of a noble elephant, fully accoutred with its howdah, or castle, filled with sporting men,



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going out against the tiger ; while a similar position on Patty-cake's left was occupied by a barley-sugar pagoda, surrounded with *bon-bons*.

At the far end, on the right, was Britannia, ruling waves of sugar, and her car drawn by dolphins, red, white, and blue.

On a crimson velvet-covered shelving stand at the back of the room arose a perfect pyramid of plate, commencing with the massive shields and salvers of olden times, and gradually tapering away into the cups and vases of the present. It had been so long locked up, that it almost seemed to stare, as if quite unused to society. Its noble owner, however, would have stared far more if he could have seen it.

The entertainment was, indeed, what Mrs. Watkins's cook (Lubbins) would call a "grand uproar."

O'er all the sumptuous elegance Mr. Fizzer's head man, Mr. Percival Pattycake, presided, having a Dirty on each side of him, and the figure footman towards the ends of the table.

Old Dirty was kept below to wash up, while Dirtiest of the Dirty wandered about the rooms, pocketing sugar, and picking up what she could.

Mr. Romford started convulsively when he got to the dining-room door, just as if he had seen another "woman in black ;" for, however bold the Beldon Hall ladies were, he did not think they dared have ventured on such a step as this.

Mrs. Hazey, too, stared with astonishment, and inwardly thought it would be

" A very fine thing to be mother-in-law
To a very magnificent fox-hunting Bashaw."

The pressure, however, from the crowd behind was too great for much soliloquising, and the huge pent-up wave of society pushed on, and presently broke against the entire length of the supper-table, all equally anxious to be at the eatables. To see the onslaught that was made on the hams, and the tongue, and the turkeys, one could not help wondering what they would have done if there had not been any supper. Nor were the jellies, the creams, or the custards a bit more neglected. "Munch,

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munch, munch," was the order of the day. At length the light artillery of *bon-bons* began to sound through the room, which, however, was quickly silenced by the more congenial fire of champagne. Fiz, pop, bang! went the corks from the right, left, and centre. Fiz, pop, bang! repeated others, and forthwith black arms and red arms, and fair arms, presented glasses across the tables to check the now overflowing exuberance of the bottles. Nor once, nor twice sufficed to repulse them—back came the glasses as though they had never been filled. The first glass, of course, was said to be good; the second middling; and the third "gusberry."

Mr. Romford having now what he called got Mrs. Hazey hanked on to her husband, wandered about alone, muttering to himself, "Where the devil do the chickens come from? where the deuce do the hams come from? where the dickens do the turkeys come from?" He knew that Betsey Shannon's friend had only undertaken to supply the ornaments. And Facey felt just as if he was going to get the stomach-ache. At this interesting juncture the fair Cassandra Cleopatra came tripping up, all smiles and radiance, though somewhat troubled in spirit, and presented arms at him in the shape of a *bon-bon*.

The champagne fire now became weaker and more languid, but the hubbub of voices and the cracking of *bon-bons* supplied the deficiency. Fizzer had sent down an unlimited supply of them, which ladies presented to gentlemen and gentlemen to ladies with the most undaunted courage. Crack, crack! shriek, crack! sounded through the spacious apartment, to which the occasional boom of the champagne corks acted like artillery. Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent. and Mrs. Somerville pulled one together, in which was the following prudent hint:—

"Be not too forward in touching toes under the table; some day you
will make a grand mistake."

while "If-father-would-but-die" was unremitting in his attention to Miss Hamilton Howard, looking as happy as if father was dead. The red or auburn-haired lady, as the case may be, was in her glory! Mrs. Somerville, too, was surrounded with

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beaux, all anxious for a smile from the beautiful widow with, as they now called it, ten thousand a year. She thought how happy she would be if she could have such a party every night in the year. People seemed to amalgamate better than they usually do on these sort of occasions. They all appeared to have specific engagements, and to be more bent on forwarding their own little affairs than watching how other people got on. Miss Mouser, to be sure, kept on the alert with her eye-glass, but they seemed to regard her much as people regard a policeman in plain clothes, or a wasp deprived of its sting.

Meanwhile the Dirties and footmen, under the direction of Mr. Percival Pattycake, replenished the tables and arranged the garniture for further assaults—mangled remains were removed and replaced with uncut viands: Fizzer did the thing well.

Facey, who had now imbibed several glasses of champagne, was sufficiently elevated to be able to treat the matter in a philosophical over-shoes, over-boots sort of way, though when he looked at the temples and towers, and other triumphs of confectionery, he couldn't but think of his proposed rabbit-pie and cheese. "Wonderful work," muttered he, with a chuck of the chin to himself, as a fresh crop of champagne took its place on the table. "The ways of the women are wonderful," added he, as a boar's head and plovers' eggs came sailing in, as though the resources of the house were inexhaustible. "Wonder how many Philistines there are here," continued he, glancing round the crowded room. "Rather keep them in prayer-books than champagne," added he, looking at the long line of empty bottles ranged against the wall below the plate trophy.

And now, having inducted the reader thus far into the evening's entertainment, we will take leave to branch off briefly to another subject, promising that if he would like a glass of champagne in the meantime he can call for it, and he won't get it.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE INVASION



W HILE all this frolicsome feasting and gaiety was going on inside the house, things wore a very different aspect at the door. The night, as we said before, was cold and frosty, with a keen cutting crescent moon; there was no accommodation either for man or horse, and the gravelled ring was so blocked with carriages that the coachmen could not get their horses moved about to keep them warm. It was a dead-lock from end to end. Under these circumstances the whole cavalcade resolved itself into a committee to discuss the meaning and probable duration of an "At home." One servant said it was a sort of a tea-drinkin', another that it was a kind of a fiddlin' concern, a third that it was just a ladies' clothes show, a fourth that they met to exchange characters of servants; but Mrs. Watkins's London Johnny assured them it was only a sort of morning call thing performed at night, to which people could come and go just as they liked. At the same time he said, "undoubtedly gentlemen's servants and 'osses ought to be provided for; porters and such like might take their chance."

Whereupon a stentorian voice, that could belong to no one but our popular friend Independent Jimmy, struck up from the moon-shaded side of the ring, declaring "it didn't see what for gentlefolk's husses and things"—meaning by the latter term "servants"—"what for gentlefolk's husses and things were to be treated differently to other people's, seein' that other people's husses might bring quite as great company as gentlefolk's;"

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and there being two postboys in the ring, they declared in favour of Jimmy's "unadorned eloquence." Whereupon a brisk and rather acrimonious discussion ensued as to the relative social position of public and private servants, Jimmy contending that the man who wore his own "claes," and knew when his day's work was done, was far more respectable than a powder-monkey Peter, who had to fetch and carry "arl day, and arl night tee" if required. Whereupon several of the Jeames *de la Pluche* tribe retorted that Jimmy, and such as him, were little better nor galley slaves, putting three days' work into one, and living like criminals; to which Jimmy retorted that if the work was hard and the fare poor he was always in health, which was more, he'd be bound to say, than many of them were, "with arl their dish-lickin' pot-wollopin' laziness." And so the debate proceeded from divers parts of the ring,—now a butler speaking, now a footman, now a tea-kettle groom, Independent Jimmy generally replying to their observations without reference to the fact of his having spoken before.

When the argument was about at its height, the sound of music came softened through the Hall to the carriages.

"Hist!" exclaimed Jimmy; "hist! arm dashed if they're not dancin'! Sink!" added he, "but they'll keep theirsels warm, whatever they de by us," Jimmy stamping severely in the bottom of the melon-frame box as he spoke.

Then there was a louder waft of music, and a louder still.

"Ay, that they are!" exclaimed Mrs. Watkins's footman, listening; "and we may be kept waiting here till 'daylight does appear.'"

"Wonder wot time they'll be thinking of us," observed Mr. Large's butler, who would have sent the footman if he had thought they would have been treated so.

"Wonder!" ejaculated Mr. Tuckwell's man; adding, "should have been out before, I think."

"Certainly," growled Mr. Bonus's servant, who, being on board wages, was inclined to indulge.

"Just you slip in, Tom," said Mr. Brogdale's coachman to his footman, "and see if there's anything to get;" adding,

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"if they don't mind about people's 'osses, they surlie might think o' the servants freezin' and starvin' in this way," the many-cape-coated speaker flagellating his broad chest as he spoke.

And Tom, nothing loth, descended from his rumble, and forthwith commenced worming his way among the carriages, making his way for the back door, with which he was well acquainted, having, when a policeman, been a suitor of Dirty No. 2's. So he opened the door and entered, just like one of the family. Nay, he did more, for knowing the ways of the house, he groped along the passages till he came to what would have been the invisible door in the dining-room but for the Miss Dirties' finger-marks, who had established a short cut that way for carrying coals to the breakfast-room. This, then, he opened, and entered the gay lightsome apartment.

Now it so happened that when Tom came in, Mr. Percival Pattycake, who was much smitten with Dirtiest of the Dirty, had resigned his post of commander-in-chief to Dirty No. 1, while he and Dirtiest of the Dirty carried on a flirtation in the deserted room; and Tom appealing pathetically to Miss Dirty's softer and better feelings, she just told him to help himself off the supper-table, whereupon Tom clutched a couple of capons, together with a tongue and a bottle of champagne, with which he returned triumphantly to the carriages. The sound of his coming, with the demand for a knife, caused quite a sensation in the ring, indeed all the way up the line towards the stables; and forthwith delegates were appointed from several of the vehicles to go on a sort of *qui tam* excursion into the house, and see what they could get as well for themselves as the coachmen.

Away they flew, like a flock of pigeons, as though they hadn't tasted meat for a month, and Lord Lonnergan's young man knowing the ways of the house too, he soon brought them, by certain circuitous ways, to the aforesaid invisible but dirt-defined door. Dirty No. 1 had now paired off with the fat boy, leaving the whole paraphernalia, ornaments and all, exposed to the mercy of the enemy. The intruders immediately set

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upon it. Mr. Blanton's young man turned a lobster salad into his livery hat, and restoring it, with a kerchief over it, to his head, next helped himself to a pigeon pie, and a bottle of seltzer water, mistaking it for curaçoa. The Dalberry Lees footman pounced on a shape of orange jelly, a nest of plovers' eggs, and a pineapple; Miss Mouser's young man ran off with a sponge cake porcupine, all bristling with almonds; Mr. Lolly's servant with a dish of Norfolk biffins; while Mr. Beddingfield's great clown of a coachman took an uncut ham in his hand, and the beautiful Elephant and Castle ornament away under his arm. Up to this time the triumphs of confectionery had been respected, partly perhaps because they did not look like man's meat, and partly because there were more tempting-looking things to be had on the table. Now, however, Mr. Beddingfield's servant's bad example was followed by Mr. Kickton's man pocketing a pair of turtle doves, to eat with some cheesecakes and a bottle of sherry.

The return of the marauders to the carriage ring was hailed with enthusiastic applause, and other adventurers were encouraged to proceed.

"You go in, Sam! You go in, Joe! You go in, Jimmy!"

"Nor, oi'll not gan in," said Independent Jimmy. "If they don't send oot, oi'll not gan in; oi've got a crust o' bread i' mar pocket," added he, diving into his dirty old Witney coat as he spoke.

Fiz, pop, bang! now went the champagne corks from the carriages, and great was the demand for a suck at the bottles, and entreaties for a fair distribution of the food. In the midst of the clamour a spluttering cry of woe arose, causing a cessation of eating for the purpose of listening.

"Hush! what's that?" was the cry.

It was the voice of the great Mr. Spanker, the Dalberry Lees coachman, who had taken a huge bite out of the pineapple without peeling it, filling his mouth full of needles and pins, as he afterwards described it. At first it was thought the worthy gentleman had taken a fit, then from the heaving of his shoulders that he was choking, and three or four smart whacks



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were administered on his back before the real cause was discovered.

And now, while they are prescribing for his much-blistered mouth, one giving him champagne out of a bottle as they give water to a racehorse, another recommending seltzer water, which was in no great demand, a third telling him to stuff his mouth full of cotton wool, let us return to our invited friends within the walls of Beldon Hall.

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CHAPTER LIV.

THE BELDON BALL.



One Turn more!

THE scene now changed, and Mr. Facey Romford, who thought he had exhausted all the wonders and surprises of the night, was doomed to undergo another apparition more startling and dazzling than any of the rest. This was neither more nor less than the beautiful gold and white drawing-room, brilliantly lighted up for a ball. The chair-covers, the brown holland bags, yea the cut pile carpet itself,

had disappeared, and a searching radiance reigned supreme. It was no light for dirty gloves or dashed dresses. The cut-glass chandeliers fulgurated their sparkling lustre, while every sconce, every bracket, every available standing-place for a lustre supported its bunch of finest spermaceti, as well to show off the beauties and elegances of the apartment itself as the beauties and elegances that were expected to enter it. And so quietly and secretly had the arrangements been made, that not one of the party, scarcely any one in the house, knew what was going to happen. Old Dirty and a daughter (Dirty No. 2) had

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removed the rolled-up carpet to the housekeeper's room, and washed the floor a few days before, but beyond this Lucy and Betsey had kept the key and their own counsel, and did the rest of the decoration themselves, even to tipping the candles with spirits of wine, in order to make them light more readily. It was only on the afternoon of the very day that Chasseur Proudlock was inducted into the secret, and told to light up as soon as ever the guests went into the supper-room, and then, having done so, to throw the door open for them to enter as they returned. And it was on their homeward voyage—Mr. Romford now convoying Mrs. Watkins, with Cassandra Cleopatra, steering her voluminous petticoats, by his side—that the first dawn of what was going to happen burst upon him.

Facey started as the flood of light shot across his path—a shock that was further increased by six well-dressed musicians slipping in before him, and hurrying up to their places in the bay. These were part of the produce of the chairman of the Half-guinea Hat Company's hundred pounds' worth of shares in that excellent speculation, and out of which Mrs. Somerville had wheedled Mr. Bonus. But of that little transaction Mr. Facey knew nothing.

There, however, were the musicians, there the ball-room, and here Mr. Romford with his assiduous ladies.

"Oh dear, what a beautiful apartment!" lisped the Dalberry Lees charmer.

"Splendid!" ejaculated Mrs. Watkins, now lost in astonishment at its size—fifteen feet longer than hers, and much higher.

Just then the pressure from behind carried them onward, and a surprised and now hilarious crowd entered the room, spreading over its ample dimensions, all anxious to try the merits of the beautiful floor. All was surprise and excitement.

"Oh dear, how charming!" "Was there ever anything so nice!" "Did you ever?" "No, I never!" "How kind of Mrs. Somerville to give us a ball."

And our hostess, who had tarried behind in the supper-room, ostensibly for the purpose of attending to her guests, but in reality to let Mr. Romford break the ice of this, the great

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finishing-stroke of the evening, without her, now came up leaning on Willy Watkins's arm, attended by Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent., while Betsey Shannon, a little in the rear, distributed her smartness among the Honorary Secretary, young Large, and the Honourable Lovetin Lonnergan. Then, as the latter reached the radiant room, there were fresh exclamations of surprise. "Oh dear! how nice! how beautiful!" and they all wanted to dance with Betsey at once. She then surveys the scene of her exertions complacently, and inwardly congratulates herself on the fact that the Facey face exhibits nothing but the surprise that might be carried off by the use of his favourite aphorism of "Verily the ways of the women are wonderful!" And wonderful they certainly were upon this occasion, converting a quiet evening and a little music into a splendid ball and supper.

Meanwhile the musicians have been tuning their instruments, young gentlemen drawing on their gloves (some wishing they were cleaner), others taking furtive glances at themselves in the mirrors, and all things conduce to an opening. The fiddlers are now in form, the assorted couples single themselves out from the crowd, the bystanders retire, the music strikes up gaily, and away they all go with a gallop.

Mrs. Somerville leads the way merrily with Willy Watkins, closely followed by Betsey Shannon with Bolingbroke Large, while the undying one starts off with Miss Hazy.

The long-secluded room is soon in a perfect petticoat whirl. The ball is well established; every Jack has got his Jill, and is ingratiating himself to the utmost of his ability. Red coats and black coats mingle with blue dresses and green, while yellow ones and white ones complete the scene. Here we might paraphrase Mr. Romford's favourite apostrophe of Beckford on the fox breaking cover, and say, "Now, where are all your sorrows and your cares, ye gloomy souls? or where your pains and aches, ye complaining ones? One pint of sparkling has dispelled them all!"

Even the fiddlers seem infected with the common enthusiasm, and stamp and shake their elbows with convulsive energy. It is to be hoped that they have some extra fiddle-strings in their

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pockets, for it would be a pity to put a stop to such a party for want of a little forethought.

The ice is now fairly broken, and even Mr. Facey Romford resigns himself to the *abandon* of unrestrained gaiety. He doesn't care a copper for anything.

"Go it, ye cripples! Newgate's on fire!" he inwardly exclaims, as he sees the blooming ladies and light-footed beaux rushing and floating and frolicking about the room. Though no great performer himself, he encircles the lisper's smart waist with his great red arm, and goes boldly in for a dance, bumping against this party, thumping against that, stamping on t'other fellow's toes. But the pace is too good to apologise.

And now the thick-winded ones begin to stop. Willy Watkins first falls out, and his example is speedily followed by Bolingbroke Large, who has been going in distress for some time. The latter is quite blown; Betsey feels him heaving: Puff—wheeze—gasps—just like old Jogglebury Crowdey running after a poacher.

"Come and have some refreshment," says she, now acting deputy-mistress of the house. And the youth being too much out of breath to reply, she leads him away; and fortunately they re-enter the supper-room just in the height of the before-mentioned foray of servants, and as Mr. Beddingfield's servant is disappearing with the Elephant and Castle. Betsey, seeing what has happened, rang the bell violently, disturbing Mr. Percival Pattycake's *tête-à-tête* with Dirtiest of the Dirty, and causing a general rush of attendants to the room. Mr. Pattycake is greatly distressed at the loss of his magnificent elephant, and forthwith offers a reward of ten shillings for its recovery; whereupon Billy Balsam goes out among the carriages, and offers the choice of half-a-crown or a constable to the man in possession, who prefers taking the half-crown; but the castle having been lost off the elephant's back in the transit, Mr. Pattycake refuses the full compensation, saying the castle was the most valuable part of the concern, and he would only give half price.

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Betsey now walked away with young Large. "Now let you and I have a spin," said she, putting herself in form for the Antelope Gallop, as they approached the ball-room door, starting off with a score directly they got within the portals. But Large was only a little better for his refreshment, and made a very poor response to the twinkling movements of Miss Shannon's pretty feet, so she very soon, what she called, "stopped the tap," and without much ceremony claimed the hand of the Honourable Lovetin Lonnergan, who, however, did not come up to her now champagne-inspired mark as a dancer. But as she was bent on business as well as pleasure, she thought to see what a little perambulation would do; so when the dance was done she walked him away, making a tour of the rooms, the passages, entrance-hall, and all, and finally brought him up at the familiar supper-table, now again in full array with the regulation complement of attendants—Dirties, footmen, Patty-cake, and all. Here, after a glass of champagne apiece, they began to pull *bon-bons*, and the Honourable Lovetin presented Betsey with a sparkling sugar-plum, with the following motto:—

"Before you take this pleasing sweet,
Let our fond lips together meet."

"Couldn't do it here, you know," whispered Betsey, smiling, but though she took him another excursion, and even asked him, when in the now-deserted cloak-room, if he knew how to spell the word "opportunity," he did not rise to the invitation. Having heard of Mr. Romford's "cat"-spelling exploit, he thought there was some catch in it, and began, o-p-op-p-o-r-por-oppo-r-t-u—

"Ah! that'll do, Solomon," said Betsey, turning him round for the door.

And now Mrs. Somerville re-enters the supper-room just as Mr. Percival Pattycake popped off the last bottle of champagne, to whom he delicately intimates the position of affairs. Then Lucy, passing round the table to the before-mentioned invisible

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door, summons him to follow her, and after rebuking him for his master's non-fulfilment of the order (as people do who are not going to pay for a thing), she gives him out a couple of dozen of Lord Lovetin's best sparkling, telling him she would deduct the price of it from Mr. Fizzer's bill, he having contracted to supply supper with unlimited wine, at so much per head—a safe venture for Lucy to make, seeing that Fizzer was not there to contradict her.

If people who give bad wine, hoping their friends won't discover it, were to see how really good wine is appreciated, they would find their mistake, and perhaps amend their ways. Upon this occasion Lord Lovetin's wine had not been up very long before it became bruited in the ball-room that there was a very superior supply of champagne going, and troops of panting dancers came pouring in, all anxiously asking for the popular beverage. Non-dancers, too, were attracted by its merits. Mr. Tuckwell, and Mr. Lolly, and Mr. Finch, and Mr. Roxton, and even Lord Lonnergan himself might be seen exalting his great excommunicated double chin as he quaffed off a bumper of the Beldon Hall supply—little thinking whose wine he was drinking. Then this improved excitement, coming at an opportune time, infused fresh spirits into the party; all

“Went merry as a marriage-bell,”

the right men getting the right partners, and swinging up and down and round about with redoubled energy. Even old Facey warms with the exercise, his knock-knees smite each other vehemently, and he gets over the ground better than before. He has divided his favours very fairly between the lady competitors; if he has galloped with one, he has waltzed with the other.

So far so good—still there was a little deficiency in the arrangements. The people outside were still wholly unthought of. Facey couldn't think of them, because he didn't know how they were coming. Lucy didn't think of them, because few ladies ever do think of those things. Betsey didn't think of

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them, because it never occurred to her that the guests wouldn't come in street-cabs, which would stand all about just as they do at Highbury Barn—and altogether there was a singular dereliction on the part of the promoters of the party for the comfort and accommodation of the outsiders.

All people, however, are of consequence to themselves, and coachmen and footmen are no exception to the rule. It aggravated them to hear the sound of mirth and music inside, while they sat blowing their fingers, or flagellating their chests with their arms to keep the circulation alive. Nor was their dissatisfaction at all diminished by the report made by the invaders of all the fine things they found in the house. To guard against a second foray, all the outer doors had now been locked and bolted, and the gallant green-and-gold Chasseur had retired within, to peep over the Dirties' heads at the door leading into the ball-room—his stalwart figure and handsome uniform making a showy background to the nicely-dressed Dirties in front. And while he was thus pleasantly engaged, whispering his soft nonsense in their ears, a noisy peal came off the front door bell that sounded as if the Lord-Lieutenant himself had arrived. A second peal, equally vociferous, followed close on the heels of the first—nay, before the first had time to get its heels well out of the way. The grand Chasseur, whose astonishment at the evening's proceedings had only been equalled by that of friend Romford himself, little doubting but it was some very great personage indeed, shook out the gay plume of his cocked hat, and restoring it with a military air to his head, summoned the two figure-footmen to precede him and open the door, while he drew himself up to his utmost altitude in front to receive whomsoever happened to come.

The lofty doors flew open, and in the noble portal stood coatless Independent Jimmy himself, whose temper having got the better of him, he had come to demand what time he was wanted.

Proudlock stepped back scornfully, shocked at the *rencontre*, for of course he knew Jimmy, though Jimmy didn't know him.

“Noo then! What time's ar wanted?” demanded Jimmy,

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thumping the butt end of his great pig-jobber-like whip furiously against the marble flags.

"Wanted! What do I know about your wants!" replied Chasseur Proudlock, indignant at the idea of having answered such a ring.

"Sink! D'ye think ar's gannin to let mar husses stand starvin' there arl neet?" roared Jimmy at the top of his stentorian voice.

"Hush! you'll disturb the dancers!" exclaimed Proudlock, waving his right arm imperiously for him to depart.

"Sink! but oi'll gan in and see," said Jimmy, pushing his way past Balsam and Bob Short, and making direct for the giant himself.

Proudlock, perhaps thinking that his military costume might intimidate, put himself in an attitude of defence, whereupon Jimmy, dropping the pig-jobber whip, at him in an instant, and planting two well-directed blows, laid him sprawling on the flags, with his right eye closed, and what the pugilists call the claret cork taken out of his nose. The giant fell heavily, and roared lustily. Oh, how he did roar! He stopped the music, and brought the dancers trooping into the hall to see what had happened. Then Old Dirty was found raising him up, with Dirty No. 2 applying a white kerchief to his nose.

"Who's dead, and what's to pay?" demanded Betsey Shannon, pressing forward through the crowd, leaning on the arm of the boy Bill.

"That imperent Jimmy has beat him most brutal!" exclaimed Old Dirty, casting an indignant eye at our imperturbable friend.

"What a go!" exclaimed Betsey, turning short round on her heel, having little doubt that Proudlock deserved it. He then got raised up and slunk off.

"Why, he's a regular Tom Sayers!" said she, looking at Independent Jimmy's stout frame, adding to Bill, "now take me back to the ball-room," and away the two tripped in a waltz.

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Great was Independent Jimmy's astonishment at finding who he had been fighting with. "Sink! ar arlways said ar could polish him off in three rounds," said he, picking up his whip, and preparing to depart. Then suddenly recollecting what he had come for, he exclaimed, "Ar say, what time's ar wanted?"

"Oh, not this hour and fifty minutes yet," replied young Mr. Bigmore.

"We won't go home till morning," exclaimed the Honorary Secretary.

"Sink! it's amaist that noo!" roared Jimmy.

But he might as well speak to the winds.

Then the dancers galloped and waltzed back to the ball-room, the stately ones following slowly and demurely, wondering what would be the result of the evening's enjoyment. There were evidently many flirtations on foot, but would any of them ripen into an offer? They would see. Mrs. Watkins and Mrs. Hazey were equally confident of the success of their daughters. If Mr. Romford had danced one more dance with Anna Maria than he had with Cassandra Cleopatra, still Mrs. Watkins had the satisfaction of knowing that he had sat out a quadrille with her daughter, and also taken her (herself) in to the supper-room.

And now the musicians, having imbibed a gallon and a half of strong ale, and had some of the cheese that Mr. Romford proposed giving his guests, set to work as if they were going to fiddle the house down. And the dancers seemed as if they were ready to assist them—the fat boy himself entering with avidity. So the ball is resumed with great ardour.

The supplementary champagne sustains the credit of the house, and people generally admit that they never saw a thing better done. Mrs. Somerville promised to be a great acquisition in Doubleimupshire, and Betsey Shannon was equally popular. It would be a shame to let them go out of the country. Long might Romford continue to hunt it. He was just the sort of man they wanted. And so the whole thing was a great success.

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The best of friends, however, must part : and as our guests, unlike Goldsmith's

' — dancing pair, that simply sought renown,
By holding out to tire each other down, '

had higher aspirations than the mere movement of the moment ; so first Mrs. Watkins, and then Mrs. Hazey, were shocked at the unwonted lateness of the hour, and Willy and the boy Bill were respectively told that they must look after the carriages directly, while the rivals were whispered that they must stop dancing at the end of the quadrille, as it was time to go home. And neither of them thinking to be able to complete the victory that evening, they were content to retire simultaneously, each feeling satisfied that none of the remaining ones could touch her. So with a smiling " I pity you " sort of air, Miss Cassandra Cleopatra presently sailed past her opponent, closely followed by Willy and Mamma, the latter giving Anna Maria a half saucy salute, that as good as said, " You won't be mistress here, my dear." And Facey, who had smote his knock-knees with dancing till they were sore, gladly furthered the departure by tendering his red arm to Mamma, who whispered her gratitude to him for the beautiful ball he had given her daughter as they went along, first to the cloak-room, and next to the carriage. Then, having got them tucked in, the lady to whom allegorically he

" — had given his hand and heart,
And hoped they ne'er again might part,"

squeezed the former most affectionately ere she drew up the window-sash. Spanker then touched the ready greys, and away they bowled from the door, just as the stable-clock struck four.

" Wonderful work," muttered Facey, as he rolled back into the house.

The Hazey's were then just emerging from the cloak-room, and Facey having paid them the same tribute of respect that he had paid the Watkinses, he returned to the ball-room to see if he couldn't, in publicans' parlance, get his house cleared.

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He gave a great unmuzzled yawn as he entered the apartment, that as good as said, "Oh, dear, but I'm tired of it." Nor was his anxiety to be done diminished by seeing that ugly old Bonus twirling Mrs. Somerville about in a waltz, while Betsey Shannon in vain tried to get the reader's old friend, Robert Foozle, to follow.

"You are not much used to waltzing, Mr. Foozle, I think?" said she, stopping short.

"No, I'm not much used to waltzing," gasped Robert.

"Better have some lessons in waltzing, I think, Mr. Foozle," said Betsey.

"Yes, I'd better have some lessons in waltzing, I think," rejoined Robert.

"Ah, come to me some morning, and I'll spin you about," said Betsey, now slipping away from him.

Whish, crush, bump! fatty Stotfold and Miss Lonnergan now knock Robert clean out of the ring. Facey then gives another great yawn.

It is melancholy work watching the decadence of a ball, the exhaustion of the dancers, the struggles to be gay against the ability to be so, the decline of the dresses until none but the shabbiest remain, the flickering of the candles, the droppings of wax, perhaps the premature demise of a lamp. All these symptoms now followed in rapid succession at Beldon Hall. The fat Misses Lonnergan got partners, the thin Misses Pinker exhibited their steps, and even Miss Mouser was induced to stand up in a quadrille. Still the thing was wearing itself out apace, and if it hadn't been for the aftermath or chaff as to the lateness of the thing, they would all just as soon have been in bed. So, sooner than give in, they danced and grinned till their cheek-bones ached.

At length the last of the crinolines disappeared under the guidance of our athletic Master, and nothing remained but those few male lingerers who so seldom get to parties that they never know when to go away—who stick to the supper-table so long as any vestige of anything remains.

Lucy and Betsey, now dreading the reckoning, stole away to



"ALL SORTS OF DREAMS."

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bed as soon as they saw Romford's broad red back disappearing with his last convoy, and our friend, on returning, seized a sherry glass, and, holding it up in mid air, exclaimed in an Independent Jimmy sort of tone, "Come, gentlemen! Oi'll give ye a bumper toast. Fill your glasses, if you please!" an invitation that was most readily complied with, in hopes of its being the precursor to a final carouse, when Facey speedily dashed the cup of hope from their lips by adding, "Oi'll give ye our *next* merry meeting!" an appeal that was too urgent for the most inveterate sitter to resist. So they quaffed off their glasses in silence, and, like the sick man's doctor,

" took their leaves with signs of sorrow,
Despairing of a drink to-morrow "

Silence then presently reigned through Beldon Hall, broken only by the airy tread of the pretty Dirties puffing out the candles, and the heavy tramp of the massive footmen bearing off the plate and the weightier articles of ornament. Facey then retired to rest, hardly able to realise the events of the evening. Nor did a broken harassing sleep contribute to the elucidation of the mystery. He dreamt all sorts of dreams—first that a Jew bailiff, dressed in white cords and top-boots, stepped out of his gig and arrested him for the supper bill just as he was finding his fox in Stubbington Gorse—that nobody would bail him, and he was obliged to leave his hounds at that critical moment. Then that all the musicians were sitting on his stomach, vowing that they would play "Old Bob Ridley" till he paid them for their overnight exertions. Next that he had backed Proudlock an even fifty to lick Independent Jimmy, and that Jimmy was leathering the giant just as he liked. Lastly, that Mrs. Somerville was off with old Bonus, and that Facey's horse Everlasting stood stock still and refused to go a yard in pursuit of them.

Other parties had their dreams. Lovetin Lonnergan dreamed that "father was dead," that he was in possession of Flush House with all the accumulations, and was just going to the

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coachmaker's to order a splendid blue and white carriage to take Miss Hamilton Howard to church ; while young Joseph Large, between paroxysms of the cramp and broken sleep, dreamt that Miss Howard was his, and was coming to adorn the halls of Pippin Priory. Robert Foozle, too, dreamt that he had got a wife without his mother's leave, and was greatly rejoiced when he awoke and found it was not so.

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CHAPTER LV.

MR. GOODHEARTED GREEN AGAIN.



THE day after a ball is always a feverish, uncomfortable affair. It is far worse than the day before; for you have all the confusion without the excitement caused by the coming event. Nobody knows when to do anything—when to get up, when to breakfast, when to lunch, when or where to dine. On this occasion the sun itself forgot to rise—at least, to shine; and those who slept with their curtains drawn and shutters closed, might have skipped the day altogether.

Jack Frost was as good as his word, and when Facey awoke, he found the landscape folded in Jack's icy embraces. "No hunting for me," said he, as, casting aside the bed-curtains, he saw the head of Roundforth Hill powdered with a sprinkling of snow. "No hunting for me," repeated he, turning over on his side; "but oi'll have a look at moy list, and see if oi can't bring some of my non-paying subscribers to book. No notion of carryin' on a country for the mere pleasure of the thing, and treat them into the bargain. Oi'm summit like the barber," continued Facey soliloquising, "who put up for a sign—

'What! Do you think
I shaves for a penny
And axes to drink?'

but when the customer, having been shaved, wanted to drink, too, the barber read the sign,—

'What! Do you *think*
I shaves for a penny
And axes to drink?'

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O'im not goin' to hunt a country for nothin', and give them balls too.

' Shave for a penny, and ax 'em to drink.' "

So saying, our Master turned over in his couch, and presently subsided into a broken, fitful sort of sleep. Thus he remained until half-past one in the afternoon, a thing he had never done before; no, not even after the most ardent harvest dance, at which festivities he used to be a great performer. He then got up, and dispensing with a shave, jumped into his lounging-suit of grey tweed, and proceeded down-stairs, as well to test the severity of the frost as to get a mouthful of fresh air before breakfast. Passing over the still blood-stained flags, he arrived at and opened the front door. What a gravel-ring was there! So different to the nicely raked thing he usually kept. It looked as if all the horses in the country had been trampling and pawing upon it. There was the pine-apple, with the great bite taken out, just as Mr. Spanker, the Dalberry Lees coachman, threw it away. There were champagne bottles strewed all around, also the bottle of seltzer-water standing upright on the window-sill, and the elephant's castle lying crushed to atoms, just as it was when Mr. Kickton's carriage-wheel passed over it. The invaders hadn't even been at the trouble of taking the borrowed ale-horn back into the house, but had chucked it down to take its chance in the general *mêlée*. A keen east wind wafted straws and paper shavings about in all directions.

" Bless us, what a sight!" exclaimed Mr. Facey Romford, looking at the *débris* spread over the battle-field. " Declare it will take a man a month to put this ring right. All the way up to the stable the same mess," added he, following up the line with his eye. " Well, if this doesn't cost something, I don't know what will! Sooner Betsey's cousin than me!" So saying, our friend picked up the pine-apple and the horn, and, wheeling about on his heel, re-entered the house, and rang the bell for his breakfast.

It was all very well ringing, but there was nobody to answer the bell; nobody but Old Dirty, at least, and she didn't care to

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come. The fact was, the breakfast-room, as indeed all the others, were just as the company had left them ; no fires lighted, candles as they were blown out, lamps as they were extinguished, chairs as they stood, some wide apart, others close together ; everything, in fact, but the supper-table was in *statu quo*. This was clean swept, Mr. Percival Pattycake, aided by Dirtiest of the Dirty, having packed up everything worth carrying off, and being then far on his way back to town, with the score of a hundred and ten people who had partaken of the Beldon Hall hospitality.

Facey rang again and again before Old Dirty came, and then she had nothing to show,—said the girls were all in bed, and declared they wouldn't get up that day. So Facey had to go down into the kitchen and get his breakfast there, fearing to await the dribbling assiduities of Old Dirty. And as he was busy making what the Frenchman called a “grand circumference” of toast for himself, first Betsey, and then Lucy, dropped in “quite promiscuous,” and a disjointed conversation arose, interrupted by the occasional entry and exit of Old Dirty, respecting the grand entertainment ; Facey fearing that he would be let in for the cost, Betsey assuring him that he had nothing to fear, as she and her friend had made it all right with old Fizzer. And though Facey did not see how a young lady who sang and danced for her maintenance could afford such a proceeding, yet knowing that the “ways of the women were wonderful,” he hoped for the best, and proceeded with his breakfast. This over, he looked at his watch, and finding it was nearly three o'clock, he gave up the idea of a stroll with his gun after the woodcocks, or anything else that turned up, and slouched away to the stable.

Among other miscarriages—or rather, misplacements—of the occasion, was that of the Beldon Hall letters. The correspondence of the house was not very large, being chiefly confined to invoices, with a slight sprinkling of refreshers in the way of bills delivered, though nothing at all approaching a regular “dun” ; but it so happened that there was a letter from Goodhearted Green himself, dated from Wallingford, saying that he had just



"EASILY HOBVIATED."

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purchased a most desirable weight-carrier, only a difficult one to mount, which he would be glad to bring to Beldon Hall himself, and pass a few days in Mr. Romford's agreeable company. And this letter, instead of being placed on the hall table, was laid on the library chimney-piece, and the first intimation Facey had of the coming guest was seeing a man of the Goodheart cut, riding a very superior-looking roan horse up towards the stables. At first, Facey thought it was Billy Barker, the brewer; then, that it was Harry Blanton, the tanner; next, that it was very like Goodhearted Green.

"And Goodhearted Green it is," said he, running up and seizing him by the hand just as he was preparing to dismount. Then, as Goodheart saw there was unusual surprise, he proceeded to inquire about the letter, when mutual explanations and welcomes followed. Facey was very glad to see Mr. Green, and Mr. Green was very glad to see his good customer, Mr. Romford. Then the two looked at the strawberry roan. He was, indeed, a fine horse, up to any weight: corks and cheerful looking, but with rather a sinister cast of the eye when any one approached him.

"Has but one fault," said Goodheart, complacently; "has but one fault—kick people over his 'ead as they mount; but easily hobviated," added he; "easily hobviated—strap up a leg as you mount," producing a strap from his pocket as he spoke.

"Well, but you can't ride him across country on three legs," observed Romford.

"True," assented Goodheart. "True; but then it's only a momentary ebullition of spleen. Soon finds out when he has got his master on his back, and then a child might ride him—ride him with a thread."

"Well, we'll try him," said Romford, now calling to Short, who came rubbing his eyes, still half-stupefied with his over-night exertions. "Here, take this horse," said Romford, "and put him into the five-stall stable, and send some one down to the Hall to say that Mr. Green is come, and bid them get a bed ready, and some more sheep chops for dinner."

The strong, persevering man then departed with his new

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charge; and Facey, turning to his friend, said, "Now let you and oi take a turn of the stables."

The two then entered the more genial atmosphere, and were presently deeply absorbed in the discussion of the condition and performance of Ben and the Baker, the peculiarities of Perfection, the deficiencies of Everlasting, the action of Oliver Twist, and the looks and eccentricities of the rest of the stud.

Lucy and Betsey were sorry that Mr. Green had not come in time for the ball, which they felt certain he would have greatly enjoyed; while Mr. Romford's anxieties were directed solely to the continuance of the frost, fearing Goodheart might not get a turn with his brilliant hounds.

The ladies received Mr. Goodheart very cordially, feeling that he would be useful in warding off any further attacks about the ball, and as Facey would not hear of any extra expense being incurred for entertaining him, they did their best to make a great man of him by putting him into the best bedroom, one that Lord Lovetin himself would not have accorded to any one under the rank of a duke, or a prince of the blood-royal, at least. There, under a magnificent temple-like canopy, nestled the old horse-dealer, a man more accustomed to the deficiencies of a garret than the delicacies of a dressing-room.

Still Goodheart was a versatile, agreeable man; and being only a lowish sort of fellow—the son of a cabman—of course he had a great knowledge of high life and Court proceedings, and could tell more of what was passing at the Palace than any lord in waiting: so, what with small talk for the ladies, and horsey talk for Facey, they got on very well together; and Goodheart was found to be a very agreeable addition to the party.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE INFIRMARY BALL.



HE Beldon Ball made a profound sensation in Doubleimupshire. It was talked of far and near. Those who were there, lauded it to the skies; those who were not, set about contriving how they could establish an acquaintance with our fair friend, Mrs. Somerville, so as to get to another if she gave one. There was no longer any doubt or hesitation in the matter. No more "Pray, who *is* this Mrs. Somerville? Do you know anything about Mrs. Somerville? Have you called on Mrs. Somerville? Are you going to call on Mrs. Somerville? Do you know if Lady Camilla Snuff has called on Mrs. Somerville?" It was all, "Oh, dear! do you know Mrs. Somerville? I should so like to know Mrs. Somerville! Charles, my dear, I must have the carriage to go over and call on Mrs. Somerville!" Then, on the Friday following, the old "Doubleimupshire Herald," a muddly county paper that seemed to edit itself, varied its quack-medicine advertisements with a list of the lady patronesses for the forthcoming Infirmary Ball, in which Mrs. Somerville's name headed the commoners, coming before Mrs. Watkins, Mrs. Large, Mrs. Brogdale, and many others who thought themselves very great ladies indeed.

And this interpolation had been made, notwithstanding the ball had been fixed and the names published for some weeks before. Then came a letter from the secretary, requesting to know how many tickets he might have the honour of sending Mrs. Somerville, which brought the matter fairly on the *tapis*—

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that is to say, under the cognizance of Mr. Romford, whose little pig-eyes had detected the advertisement, though he had not thought proper to mention it. Bold Betsey, as usual, led the charge, taking advantage of a lull that occurred between the consumption of a couple of bottles of Lord Lovetin's best port, and the adoption of gin and pipes by the gentlemen. At first, cunning Facey pretended not to hear, being busy with his baccy; so she addressed herself to our friend the horse-dealer, who commenced business with a cigar.

But Green was not quite happy in good society. He was conscious that he rather knocked his H's about. Indeed he and his friend Billy Slater, the latter of Bermondsey, had gone to the sign of the Mermaid at Margate only the summer before the period of our story, and Goodheart being spokesman had addressed the landlord (a cousin of Skittle's), who was smoking a Manilla with ineffable ease at the front door, demanding to know if they "could have a couple of good hairy bedrooms." Whereupon the landlord, taking his cigar from his mouth, replied with a supercilious smile, "Well, I don't know; I can rub a couple with bear's grease for you, if you like." And it was this not knowing whether to put the H in, or to leave it out, that made Goodheart uncomfortable. He knew that it was either one way or the other, and his anxiety to be right very often made him wrong. He, therefore, did not care to show off at the Infirmary Ball, and the long list of fashionable patronesses had no attractions for him. But the ladies, who saw the advantage, were all for going, and of course could not do without the gentlemen. Oh, what was to stop them from going? There was no hunting, and it would be something for them to do. The melon-frame would hold four, or two inside and two out if the gentlemen objected to the crinolines, and the cost of the conveyance would be all the same for four as for two. Then in answer to Goodheart's objections that he wouldn't know any one, Lucy reminded him that she was a lady patroness, and her brother, Mr. Romford, hunting the country. Lastly, Goodheart played his real card, namely, "that they would smoke him and blow him," which

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would be prejudicial to the Beldon Hall ladies, as well as to himself.

This argument rather told. Lucy was on her preferment, and must not do anything to bring her down the ladder of society. The associate of countesses, and viscountesses, and honourables must be discreet. Then Betsey Shannon, whose counterfeit abilities were first-rate, and who knew the advantages of a high-sounding name herself, suggested that Mr. Green might go under an assumed one, or a title if he liked. And this idea being unanimously applauded, things began to get into the grooves that Lucy and Betsey wanted them. Facey thought it would be good fun to humbug the Larkspurites; and they began to consider what they should call Mr. Green—Lord Topboots, Lord Silverpow, Lord Gammon, Lord Horseley, Lord Thoroughpin, Lord Spavin, Lord Stringhalt, Lord Glanders, and a variety of similar names.

“No, no,” interposed Betsey, seeing they were making fun of it, “that will not do; he shall not be a lord at all. That will only set them looking into their Peerage, and pulling him to pieces.”

“Let him be a Sir—Sir Somebody Something; and then if they say ‘he’s not a Bart.,’ you can say, ‘no, he’s a Knight;’ and if they say ‘he’s not a Knight,’ you can say, ‘no, but he’s just going to be made one,’ or put it off in that way.” And this idea being applauded too, they began to try on other titles, just as Mrs. Sponge tried on names when she changed hers from Sponge to Somerville. Sir Reginald Rover, Sir Arthur Archduke, Sir Timothy Trotter, Sir Peter——

“No, no,” said Betsey, “let’s have something that is neither too fine, nor too low—something that will sound so natural as not to create suspicion or inquiry, that will come trippingly off people’s tongues.”

“Suppose we call him Sir Roger de Coverley,” suggested Mrs. Somerville, still thinking of the ball.

“No, that would be too theatrical,” said Betsey; “but we might call him Sir Roger something else—Sir Roger Russell, Sir Roger Brown.”

“Sir Roger Ferguson s’pose,” said Facey.

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"Very good name," rejoined Betsey. "very good name. Your servant, Sir Roger Ferguson," said she, rising and making Goodheart a low curtsy, just as she curtseyed for an encore at Highbury Barn.

And the man of the H's finding there was no halterative, was at length obliged to submit, and ultimately came in to the humour also of having a star to decorate his coat on the occasion. This Betsey Shannon undertook to procure from the same quarter as she did the liveries and the uniform for Mr. Proudlock the keeper.

Behold, then, the auspicious evening—a bright starlight night—with our now noble horse-dealer arrayed in a gentlemanly suit of black, relieved by his glittering star and snow-white head. Mr. Romford, on the other hand, was gay and gaudy, scarlet Tick, white vest, with his El Dorado shirt puffing out in front beneath a white tie, altogether a very passable swell, and on very good terms with himself.

The ladies, we need scarcely say, were quite differently dressed to what they were at the Beldon Ball, for who can be expected to appear twice in the same costume—certainly not Mrs. Somerville, or her fair friend, Miss Hamilton Howard (*vice* Shannon), who had all the resources of London dress-makers at their command. Nothing to do but send off the order, and have the things down in no time. The coroneted Beldon Hall note-paper was as good as gold in the London market, and Madame Elisa and Co. could never see too much of it. It was always lying about their show-rooms.

Considering that there was so much money in Doubleimupshire, so many teapot-handle-makers, so many Ten-and-a-half-per-Centers, it was strange that they should have no better ball-room than what the old town-hall at Butterwick, built on the principle of Goldsmith's

"Chests contrived a double debt to pay,
A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day,"

supplied. Nay, indeed, it had harder work than the chest of drawers, for it served as well for a corn and butcher market as

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a town-hall, while by closing up the interstices between the great stone pillars on which the brick edifice was raised, and opening a temporary staircase on the left, the lower part of the hall served for a theatre as well. So that, on an occasion like the present, the ball-comers might hear Hamlet junior objurgating his too too solid flesh, or get their toes trod on by the ghost of Hamlet senior stalking off the stage at cock-crow. Nay, indeed, at certain times—for instance, when an army was in motion, the setters-down had to wait for the nick of time before they could effect a passing at all, just as children at the sea-side have to wait till the receding wave gives them a chance of getting after their outward-bound boats. On this occasion a leathern-lunged Richard was roaring for his horse just as our Beldon party entered—"A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!"

"I'll suit you!" exclaimed Goodheart in the same tone, ignorant of the situation, and forgetful of his greatness. The side scenes passed, and the sort of scaling-ladder staircase ascended, the adjuncts to the ball-room were little better than the arrangements down below. There was no cloak-room for the gentlemen, who had to hang their hats and wraps up in the passage, while that for the ladies was of the smallest, most circumscribed order, being, in fact, the apartment occupied by the market keeper and his wife.

The ball-room, however, was large and lofty, seventy feet by fifty, open up to the dark oak rafters of the roof. The walls were decorated with town and county notabilities—some in peers' robes, some in aldermanic honours, some in plain clothes—all the work of first-rate country artists, quite ready to set Mr. Ruskin and all the Royal Academy at defiance.

Of course a great man like our Master was hailed long before he got into the ball-room, and as Goodheart (now Sir Roger) and he stood waiting for the ladies—wondering what the deuce they were doing—Facey had an opportunity of introducing the Baronet to some of his acquaintances—Sir Roger Ferguson, Mrs. Telford; Mr. Bowman, Sir Roger Ferguson; Sir Roger Ferguson, Mr. Lightfoot. But it was when the line of march

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was formed, and the gay-e-claurel party appeared improvingly at the doorway, the decorated Sir Roger beaunting Mrs. Somerville, our red-coated Romford escorting Miss Shannon, that the fever of excitement arose.

The opening dance was just over, the couples were sweeping the floor with their trains, while the *chaperones* sat by criticising their partners, some feeling satisfied, others thinking they could have made a better selection. In a semicircular bay at the high end of the room, wherein they adjusted as well the weights and scales as the consequence of the county, was an imposing array of diamond dowagers, looking terribly severe in their dignity of state. These were the titled patronesses, whose magnetic influence attracted sovereigns from the pockets of parties little accustomed to voluntary contributions. Even Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent. himself had been drawn. As the Beldon party entered the room, and gradually approached the crescent of consequence, eye-glasses were raised, and inquiries were—"Who are these?" "Who have we here?" eliciting whispers of—"Oh! this will be Mrs. Somerville." "This will be Mr. Romford's sister." The first questions being quickly followed by—"Who is this with her?" "Who is the man with the star?" A question that was not quite so easily answered.

On, on, our gallant party went, just as Lord Cardigan went against the cannon, only instead of charging right into them, they now wheeled round, our fair friends feeling satisfied that the dowagers could not take any more exception to the backs of their dresses than they could to the fronts. So they sailed slowly down the room again, looking out for admiration as they went.

Before, however, the party had got half way down the room there was a run upon our fair friends, Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent. claiming Mrs. Somerville, while young Joseph Large and Lovetin Lonnergan hastily disposed of their then partners in order to be first for Miss Howard. Large, however, got the lady, Lovetin not being able to find his partner's *chaperone* so soon

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as the other, but Miss Howard made it all right by a sweet smile, and saying, "I'll dance next dance with you, Mr. Lonnergan." So Lovetin stood by, admiring her elegant figure and performance, thinking if father *would* but die he would marry her and set her up in Flush House to-morrow. Then came Lovetin's turn—a quadrille—and Miss Howard was equally assiduous with him, for, with a father to die on each side, there really was not any great choice between the two thick-headed suitors. Large then had the pleasure of looking on and seeing that "lout Lovetin" getting all the sweet dimple-making smiles and smirks, which, with a certain quantity of eye and tongue work, constitute what ladies call flirtation. Then, as they couldn't both dance with her at once, they began to engage Mrs. Somerville for what Facey called the "bye days," and she adroitly insinuated to each that he was the especial favourite, and that Miss Howard did not care a halfpenny for the other. She also intimated Miss Howard would have a large fortune from her grandmother, who was very old and much addicted to drink. Thus quickened, each resolved, if possible, to steal a march upon the other.

Facey and Sir Roger were thus left alone, and Facey renewed his introductions of his friend—Mr. Crackenthorpe, Sir Roger Ferguson; Sir Roger Ferguson, Mr. Elsome; Mr. Thomas Tongue, Sir Roger Ferguson. And Mr. Tongue, who was a general acquaintanceship man, believed he had had the honour of meeting Sir Roger before at their mutual friend Lord Lumbago's, if he mistook not; a fact that Sir Roger then perfectly recollected, and was much obliged to his friend, Mr. Tongue, for reminding him. And Sir Roger tendered his hand very cordially in return. Then the two old friends walked about the room, and when people afterwards asked Tongue who that was with the star, he replied, "Oh, that's my old friend, Sir Roger Ferguson; haven't seen him these twenty years, never since we met at our poor friend Lord Lumbago's."

And Sir Roger Ferguson, being now pretty well laid in for

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acquaintance, told Romford not to mind him any more, but to get himself suited with a nice useful little short-legged woman, and go in for a dance. And the lisper making the grand entry just at the moment, our hero claimed her fair hand at once for a waltz, which he executed so clumsily as to draw forth a mental observation from Sir Roger that Mr. R. must be a better hand at riding than he was at dancing. And the dowagers, having now reconnoitred Sir Roger from afar, and thinking he was a nice wholesome-looking man with his clean linen, snow-white head and roseate hue, began to negotiate for an introduction, and think of admitting of his star into their august circle, for which purpose Lady de Tabby, who was a regular pedigree monger, instructed Mr. Thomas Tongue to tell his friend that a cousin of Lady Ferguson's would be glad to make his (Sir Roger's) acquaintance. And, though there was no regular Lady Ferguson for Lady de Tabby to claim relationship with, yet he went boldly in for the introduction, and was presently seated between Lady de Tabby and the Honourable Mrs. Freezer, to whom he was presently introduced by her ladyship. And Lady de Tabby, not driving the relationship scent beyond the first brush, Sir Roger let it drop also, and was presently engaged in criticising what he called the "field"; this girl's looks, that one's figure and performances. Some he thought clever, but others, he said, wanted condition sadly. Thus Romford gained credit by Goodheart, and Goodheart lost nothing, except, perhaps, a few H's, which the noise of the room concealed as they fell.

Meanwhile the ball proceeded with great vigour; the floor was good, barring certain sockets about the centre of the room, used for setting up the apparatus of conjurers and chairmen of quarter sessions, which those who had hit their toes against once, took care not to come in contact with a second time if they could help it, and though the three-and-fourpenny tea was a poor substitute for Lord Lovetin's Cliquot champagne, so freely dispensed at Beldon Hall, yet it was better than nothing, and served to make a break in the evening's amusements. And in due time Sir Roger Ferguson

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sailed grandly up the middle of the room with Lady de Tabby on one arm, and the Honourable Mrs. Freezer on the other, looking as consequential as a Lord Mayor in full fig. And Lady Camilla Snuff, who was in pretty much the same line of business as Lady de Tabby, and of course didn't like her, wondered who the pushing, tuft-hunting woman had got hold of now. Both the ladies in possession thought Sir Roger very agreeable, though he did not reciprocate by singing

"How happy could I be with either," &c.

The fact was, Sir Roger would rather have been in bed.

And Mrs. Somerville played her cards so well between the rival suitors that Lovetin Lonnergan, who was the more ardent and impulsive of the two, screwed up his courage during the dancing of the "Lancers" to sound Betsey Shannon if she would accept him conditionally—that is to say, accept him and keep the thing snug until father would be good enough to die, which he insinuated could not be very long, as he was seventy-six years of age, and getting very shaky on his pins. And Betsey, having the *grande ronde* of the dance to consider the matter in, recollecting that Large had a father too, a tougher-looking one than Lord Lonnergan, and that an offer was an offer—a good thing under any circumstances, she made as pretty a downcast simpering acceptance as she could raise, and at the conclusion of the dance was led, not to the hymeneal altar, but to a smoking hot Gladstone claret cup now placed on the tea-table at the lower end of the room, wherein they pledged each other their troth.

"Mrs. Lovetin Lonnergan, your very good health."

"Mr. Lonnergan, your good health," whispered Betsey, turning her beautiful blue eyes full upon him. So they clenched the bargain.

Then meeting Mrs. Somerville, who was now fanning the flame of young Large's ardour, telling him about the rich grandmamma addicted to drink, Betsey gave her a knowing



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look which, with a slight sideways jerk of her pretty head at her partner, as good as said "I've captured this cock."

And the Honourable Lovetin Lonnergan, flushed with success and the influence of the claret cup, looked at his opponent in a triumphant sort of way, as much as to say, "I pity you, old boy!" But Large, nothing daunted by the haughty appearance of the tenant in possession—on the contrary, rather encouraged by the agreeable intelligence just conveyed by Mrs. Somerville—returned his supercilious stare with another, and a tolerably loud exclamation of "What a lout that young Lonnergan is!"

And now Mrs. Somerville, having primed them both, and Sir Roger Ferguson having got rid of his tabbies, Mrs. Somerville and he did the consequential up and down the ball-room together, eliciting bets from the acute and censorious as to how long it would be before she was Lady Ferguson.

"Too old for her by half," said one.

"Ah, but a 'star' will compensate for all that," observed another.

"Fresh old fellow, too," muttered a third.

"What will old Bonus say?" asked a fourth.

"Never marry such an old rat as that," said a fifth.

Then the music sprang up again, and Sir Roger and Mrs. Somerville stood criticising the performers, remarking on this one's head, that one's shoulders, t'other one's feet. People do not work themselves so severely at a pay ball as they do at a gratis one. They seem as if they could get enough for their money, and having had it, go away. Whether it is the absence of the Cliquot, or gooseberry, as the case may be, or that they think it does not look well to stay too late, we know not; but certain it is, that there is always a great deal of forethought and arrangement about getting away.

On this occasion the stately patronesses began to move first; and Sir Roger Ferguson's services were again enlisted in calling up and putting them into their carriages, which he did with the ease and agility of a London linkman. Then all the *chaperones* began looking at their variously-going watches, trying amongst

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them to cast the nativity of the time, followed by rushes at their panting yet avoiding charges, urging them not to engage themselves for any more dances, assuring them, perhaps, that the carriage had been called up a dozen times, or that it was an hour and a-half later than it really was. So at length the effervescence of the evening gradually died out ; and, in lieu of sparkling eyes and twirling gauze, hooded nun-like ladies were seen hurrying along the passage, enveloped in the wraps and disguises of the night. Then came the descent of the scaling-ladder, the groping past the wings of the now deserted stage, and the ascent into the great family coach, or the squeeze into the curiously contrived turbot-wells of modern times. Away they drive, amid the varied thoughts and reflections of the hour. Those who have done well hug themselves with the recollection of it ; those who have done little make the most of that little, and, casting forward to the future, hope for better luck another time. Foremost in the happy party was our friend Betsey Shannon, who could hardly wait until the melon frame got clear of the jolty cobble-stones of Butterwick ere she announced to her fair companion (Sir Roger and Facey being outside), that she had brought him to book.

"Well, which?" exclaimed Lucy, who had forwarded both their suits so evenly as to be unable to say which was likely to be the winner.

"*Lovetin!*" replied Betsey, with emphasis.

"Bravo, *Lovetin!*" exclaimed Lucy, clapping her pretty hands. "Bravo, *Lovetin!*" repeated she. "Ah, now! if father would but die," she added, with a laugh.

"Well, it's not to be till then," rejoined Betsey.

"Ah, but I wouldn't stand that," said Lucy. "Make him marry you now, dear, and keep it snug till father does die, if *Lovetin* likes. 'Safe bind, safe find,' is a capital maxim."

"Well, but suppose he won't?" said Betsey, who did not like to lose the chance of being Mrs. Lonnergan.

"Then take t'other chap; he's quite as good a catch as *Lovetin*, only his pa is a little younger; but then, on the other

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hand, they say Pippin Priory is a much better place than Flush House."

"True," ruminated Betsey. "true;" adding, "either would do very well."

"He's sure to offer," observed Lucy, "sure to offer. I'm only surprised he hasn't done it to-night. I primed him up that you were a member of one of the oldest families in Wales, and had a boskey old grandmother at Leighton-Buzzard, who would leave you a hatful of money."

"Indeed," laughed Betsey, joyfully. "Anything better than dancing at Highbury Barn. If Large has the pull in the face way, t'other has it in the figure."

"Oh, all cats are grey in the dark," rejoined Lucy. "You catch one of them, and get a home of your own; for there's nothing so bad as dependence."

"True," assented Miss Shannon.

The two ladies then leant back in the carriage, each following a line of scent of her own; Betsey thinking what a dash she would cut at Flush House (for the Honourable had inducted her into the anticipated carriage splendour), Lucy thinking how to play Large off against Lonnergan, so as to secure one or other for her friend. At length Lucy spoke, breaking in upon an imaginary carriage airing that Betsey was taking with her lovely Lonnergan.

"Oh, I would make him marry you off-hand now," said she, reverting to her former position. "If he won't, Joe Large will. Indeed, as I said before, I only wonder he didn't offer to-night."

"Well, I think he will," replied Betsey; "only, as he seemed to be leading up to the point, that stupid matter-of-fact hatter came up, and would have me to dance with him, and stuck to us till I did."

"Stupid marplot!" muttered Lucy; "these sort of boobies think that people come to balls to do nothing but dance; whereas every one knows that the real business of a ball is either to look out for a wife, to look after a wife, or to look after somebody else's wife. However, never mind," continued

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she, drawing the buffalo skin coverlid up to her chin, "never mind. Large will come to call before long, and then we will see what we can do, for 'sharp' must be the word,—first come first served, the rule. Such chances as these don't occur every day; and though people are good enough to take us at our own price at present, yet there is no saying how soon a change may come, and then they would be equally furious the other way; so we must just strike while the iron's hot, and capture one or other of the idiots."

So saying, she gradually sunk off in a doze, and the next thing that occurred was the tapping of Independent Jimmy's great knuckles at the melon-frame window, announcing that they were back at Beldon Hall.

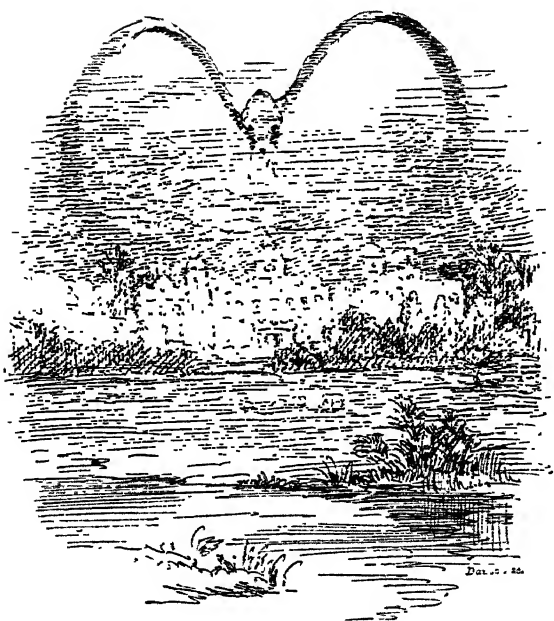
"Noo, then, get out!" said he, clattering down the harsh iron steps, and leaving them to effect the descent as they could.

The ladies and gentlemen hurried into the house, and discarding their wraps, they awoke Dirtiest of the Dirty, who was dosing over the breakfast-room fire, dreaming of Percival Pattycake. They discussed the events of the evening over some of Lord Lovetin's best Cognac brandy; and at twenty minutes to four, Mr. Romford moved the adjournment of the debate.

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CHAPTER LVII.

THE COUNTESS OF CAPERINGTON.



Beldon Hall.

RS. SOMER-
VILLE was
right in the ad-
vice she gave
Miss Shannon,
when coming
home from the
Infirmary Ball,
to get married
as quick as she
could, for things
at Beldon Hall
had gone so ex-
tremely well that
Lucy feared a
reverse.

She thought it
was too good to
last. We often
see things in this

world go so smoothly at first that there seems no chance of a failure, when all of a sudden they take a turn, and down they come with a run. Certainly, amongst them our friends at Beldon Hall combined as much duplicity as could well be contained in a party of four. First there was Mr. Romford, acting the turbot-on-its-tail, deceiving poor Lord Lovetin, Lord Lonnergan, and all; then there was Mrs. Sponge,

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calling herself Mrs. Somerville, and Betsey Shannon, arrogating the distinguished name of Hamilton Howard; and now the old Clerkenwell "'oss dealer," Mr. Goodhearted Green, passing himself off for a baronet.

All or any were liable to be detected at any moment—Mr. Romford by Lord Lovetin's making his long-meditated journey to England, Mrs. Somerville by the frequenters of theatres and cigar shops, Miss Shannon by half the counter-skippers in London, and Sir Roger Ferguson by any stray tourist or stableman with whom he had ever done business.

The only way our friends bore up against the accumulation of deceit was, by never thinking of the consequences. Enough for the day was the evil thereof, they all felt. There was no disputing one thing, namely, that they had been most wonderfully favoured and that people seemed quite as much inclined to deceive themselves as they were to deceive them. But a day of reckoning always comes at last, though in this case neither man nor woman was the immediate cause of its advent.

Leotard, the wondrous Leotard, the cream-coloured lady's horse, who has already played such a conspicuous part in our story, was now destined to fulfil still greater achievements. The last we heard of him was, when the boy Bill satisfied himself of his paces by private trial at Tarring Neville, while Mr. Romford and Mrs. Somerville were regaling after the hunt with the considerate Mrs. Watkins's bag fox. Since then Mrs. Somerville had ridden Leotard with varying success and satisfaction, the horse sometimes going remarkably well, sometimes only middling—oftener perhaps, middling than well—at other times ill, or rather not at all. Lucy, however, never risked an open rupture with him. If she found he was going to be queer, she went home with him, pretending that his way was hers also. So the horse maintained his reputation for beauty and docility. Mrs. Somerville and her horse were always greatly admired; people were proud to open the gates to her.

Foremost among the horse's admirers was Independent Jimmy's friend, Mr. Hazey, or Second-hand Harry, as he was commonly called. Hazey was always on the look-out for horses,

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not so much to supply his own wants as to know where to lay hands on them, in case he could place them to advantage,—that is to say, get a little more for them than he gave. He was always touting, and sneaking, and “do-you-know-anything-to-suit-me-ing?” every man he met. Cheating in horses has become quite a science. Formerly the dealers had the monopoly, but what they now facetiously call the “gentlemen” have trod heavily on their heels of late. They are more skilful, more unscrupulous, and, we really think, lie better. The fact is, the real professionals haven’t time to concoct the ingenious and elaborate schemes now hit off by the disengaged idler. Moreover, the amateurs have access to society that the dealers have not; know the haunts and habits of victims better, and how to cajole them.

What is the waste of a week to a man who has nothing whatever to do but sit in the Park and pick his teeth with a quill? But time is money with a horse-dealer. He may have to be in Edinburgh, or Exeter, or Horncastle, while the other gentleman is arranging his plant.

Hazey had a great connection in what Mr. Thackeray would have called the “Roundabout” line—many touts, many spies, many stable sneaks, many idle gentlemen looking out for him. He knew how to keep the lower order of veterinary surgeons in good humour, so as to get them to pass almost anything. One of his cardinal rules was, never to tell where a horse came from. If he bought him in Cheshire, he would declare he came from Shropshire; if he came from the east he would say he came from the west. In this there was good policy, for there is nothing so easy as to find out all about a horse, provided you can but find out where he comes from. Every ostler and helper can tell you something, and they generally speak truly, too. Tommy will “mind” his being foaled; Jacky will remember his being backed; Tomkins can tell when he was shod; and plenty will remember when he first came out with the hounds with Willy Winship on his back, who, of course, showed them all the way.

Now, as ill-luck would have it, among Mr. Hazey’s many

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miscellaneous friends, was the well-known Captain Coper, late of that distinguished corps, the Horse Marines, who, at this juncture, knew a man who knew a "female woman" who knew a gentleman who knew the Right Honourable the Countess of Caperington, and her ladyship wanted a horse—a perfect lady's horse—for which her noble husband would give any reasonable price. And a lady in that position not being likely to remain long unsuited—at all events, unsolicited—she was presently besieged with horses of all sorts and sizes: bay horses, brown horses, black horses, a great variety of horses; but unless a party is properly introduced, that is to say, has made a satisfactory arrangement with the middle-man, he has very little chance of effecting a deal, and the Countess had rejected horse after horse that might have suited her uncommonly well if they had not been crabbed by the go-between, who, of course, had not been properly propitiated.

At length Captain Coper (who had then lately been rusticating "over the water") heard of her ladyship's want, and bestirred himself to supply it. Resolving in his capacious mind the various parties he had done business with, he came to the conclusion that Mr. Hazey, being a master of hounds, would be the most likely (supposing they could agree upon terms) to supply the deficiency and obtain a long price. So he wrote "Dear Hazey" a letter, asking what he had in the lady's horse line, and the percentage he would stand for an introduction to a real live Countess in want of a perfect picture of a horse. And Hazey, albeit he had a horse or two that had something in the habit line, to wit, Bill's gallant grey, and a bay that dug its toes into the ground at each tenth step, and shied at everything it met on the road, yet he still thought they were hardly up to the exalted honour of carrying a Countess—no doubt a pretty one, as Countesses always are. If she had been a commoner, he would have tried it on with these, declaring there were not two such paragons in the world, and were both so good that he didn't care which he sold.

But a Countess might be made available in a variety of ways: she might call on Mr. Hazey in London—she might present

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Anna Maria at Court, perhaps, which would be extremely agreeable. And the thought of Anna Maria presently brought Mr. Romford to his recollection, and in due course came Mrs. Somerville and her beautiful cream-coloured horse. "Ah, there now!—there was an animal!" mused Hazey, with a chuck of his chin; "the very thing, if Mrs. Somerville would but sell him. And there was no saying but she might sell him—didn't see why she shouldn't sell him. He was sure he would sell him if he had him, and could get a good price." Then the recollection of Facey and the hospital for decayed sportsmen rather checked him. They might be extra-independent, to be sure, but still he didn't see why he mightn't sound them; so he set Bill to set Silkey, to set Storey the horse-breaker, to set big Rumbold the veterinary surgeon of Burchester, to ferret out what chance there was of Mrs. Somerville selling Leotard.

And now, whilst they are busy prosecuting their inquiries we will say a few words respecting the Countess of Caperington herself.

The Right Honourable the Countess of Caperington, we need scarcely say, was not always the Countess of Caperington; no, nor anything approaching one. In fact, she began life as an actress, as Miss Spangles of the Theatre Royal, Bungington. Here her beauty and ardent coquetry captivated a fast young baronet, the late Sir Harry Scattercash, of Nonsuch House in G—shire. Miss Spangles became Lady Scattercash, and did the honours of the house with great liberality so long as there was any house to do the honours in. All the sock-and-buskin tribe had a hearty welcome at Nonsuch House, and long and serious were the symposia that ensued. Mrs. Somerville, then Lucy Glitters, had the run of the house, and it is not unlikely that what she there saw taught her how to manage matters at Beldon Hall. And of all the sock-and-buskin tribe, none was more truly welcome than that celebrated actor Mr. Orlando Bugles, late of the Surrey Theatre. Bugles had a bed whenever he liked to run down: nor was he shy in availing himself of his privilege.

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Drinking, however, is only a question of time, and sooner or later has always the same ending. Worn out with debauchery and premature decay, Sir Harry Scattercash presently departed this life at the early age of thirty-two, and where could the lovely widow seek for sweeter solace than on the manly bosom of Mr. Bugles. Lady Scattercash married him. But beloved Orlando, we are sorry to say, took to evil ways also—brandy-and-water was his bane too; and twice in three years Lady Scattercash found herself a widow. Having seen Bugles buried, “*b-e-a-u-tifully* put away,” as she described it, she again came to town, and presently terminated an engagement at the Lord Lowther music saloon by running away. The next thing heard of her was, that she had become the Countess of Caperington! How this came about nobody knows but the Earl and Countess themselves, and being a lady before the marriage this match excited far less attention than it would have done had it been contracted with Miss Spangles. Sir Charles Bridoon, the next taker of the title, or the Ladies Caresson, the Earl’s sisters, might complain and say, “Who *is* this Lady Scattercash?” but the world at large were content to take her ladyship as a true and correct Countess. And, indeed, so far as looks were concerned, she was an ornament to the Peerage, for she was just in the full development of womanly beauty—fat, fair, and thirty, with as much ease and vivacity as Betsey Shannon herself. The Earl was as proud of her as if he had married her first-hand, and was never tired of contemplating her beautiful face under a variety of bonnets. Not only bonnets, but hats, caps, hoops, everything that appeared in the chronicles of fashion. When her ladyship’s carriage drew up with a dash at Mrs. Slyboots’ the milliner’s, in the commercial town of Worryworth, there used to be such a commotion raised in the shop, to the neglect of all the rest of the customers, Mrs. Boots breaking off in her recommendation of thirteen-and-ninepenny bonnets for two guineas, with “Mary!” “Jane!” “Susan!” to her elegant young people who were serving, “look out!—look out! Here’s the Countess of Caperington coming—here’s the Countess of Caperington coming!” as if

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all people's wants were to succumb to those of her ladyship. Then there was such curtseying, "your ladyshipping," and worshipping, as if nobody's custom was worth anything compared to her ladyship's.

Our business at present, however, is to get the Countess a horse; so, leaving her to turn over the contents of Mrs. Slyboots' shop at her leisure, we will proceed to inquire after Mr. Hazey's success in the equestrian line.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE DEAL.



R. RUMBOLD, the veterinary surgeon, did not take much by his journey to Beldon Hall. The fact was, Mr. Facey had his servants better drilled than to give information to people merely because they wanted to have it; and our friend being a bit of a vet himself,

Rumbold was just about the last man he wanted to see hanging about his stables. Nor was Hazey more successful with either Jowers the blacksmith, or Mr. Golightly, the exciseman: for Chowey spun one of them out of his stable, and Swig the other. And Captain Coper being *exigeant*,—having, as he wrote, many applications from other parties anxious to suit the fair Countess with a horse, Hazey was obliged to “Dear Romford” our hero, and to have recourse to the lie applicable to the occasion. Thus he wrote :—

“TARRING NEVILLE,
“*Thursday Night.*

“DEAR ROMFORD,

“I chanced to hear out hunting to-day that Mrs. Somerville has some thought of parting with her cream-coloured horse (Blondin, I think she calls him); and I write to say that if it should happen to be the case, I think I know of a lady who would be likely to be a purchaser. Of course, at this time of year, ladies’ horses are not in great demand; but I think, with a little management, we might get what is fair and right, which I am sure is all that either of us would think of requiring. I hope this sale, if true, is not a sign of Mrs. Somerville’s departure, for we can ill afford to lose so ornamental an

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appendage to our hunting-fields and to society in general. Mrs. Hazey and my daughter beg their kind regards to her and Miss Herbert, with, my dear Romford,

“ Yours very truly,

“ H. HAZEY.

“ FRANCIS ROMFORD, ESQ.,

“ BELDON HALL, DOUBLEIMPSHIRE.”

The letter came very opportunely, for Sir Roger Ferguson was still at Beldon Hall, which enabled our master to arrange with him the price of the horse, as well as to use Sir Roger as an incentive to the intending purchaser. There is generally a fat goose in every hunt, who is the reputed purchaser of all the horses that other people want to sell, and your regular “sticker” for price can never give a direct answer, without first indulging in a great, long exordium as to what said goose will give. So Sir Roger was now selected to fill the honourable post of puffer to Leotard. Lucy therefore wrote, on her own account, to say that her horse was for sale, and, by a single coincidence, their friend, Sir Roger Ferguson, was anxious to purchase him for a Park hack for himself; but, hearing that a lady wanted him, with his usual gallantry, the worthy Baronet consented to waive his preference, and let Mr. Hazey’s friend have the refusal of him. Then, without saying anything about the horse’s merits, defects, or peculiarities, she branched off upon the weather, hoping the frost would soon give, and enable the poor pent-up fox-hunter to take the field! and reciprocated Miss Hamilton Howard’s and her own good wishes to Mrs. Hazey and family, and volunteered to send Mr. Romford’s and Sir Roger’s also.

Then, in a postscript, she adroitly added, that Sir Roger had offered £150 for Leotard, at which price Mr. Hazey could have him.

The answer rather staggered friend Hazey, for £150 was a London price—quite an immense one in the country, where they expect to get two or three horses for that money; added to which, Hazey’s own profit and Captain Coper’s regulars would bring the price up to a couple of hundred. Then, on

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the other hand, there was a Countess and a Baronet to operate upon ; and, all things considered, Hazey thought he should not be doing himself injustice if he wrote Coper word he had a perfect animal at command for £175 ; adding, that the Countess must be quick in her decision, for there was a Baronet after the horse, who didn't stick at price. Hazey then gave a very minute description of Leotard, so glowing and flattering that few could resist him.

Coper was a dashing dealer, always rounding his figures and going for guineas, and immediately made Hazey's £175 into two hundred guineas, at which price he wrote the man who knew the "female woman" who knew the gentleman who was acquainted with the Countess of Caperington, that a perfect lady's horse could be had. He also copied the descriptive part of Mr. Hazey's letter, and dwelt on the fact of the Baronet's competition. And the offer, in due course, came to the Countess. Now, two hundred guineas is a longish price for a hack ; but then it is a price that carries such respectability with it as almost to supersede the necessity of circumspection. Who would think of asking two hundred guineas for a horse that was not something out of the common way. A twenty-pounder is always a suspicious animal ; but three-figure horses sell themselves. Moreover, the Countess fancied the cream-colour ; thought she would look well upon it, with its flowing mane and tail ; and so there was nothing for it but to have it. A cheque was therefore transmitted by the circuitous route that the message had come. Coper then docked off his "regulars ;" Hazey took his ; and, finally, Mrs. Somerville received a hundred and fifty pounds for a horse that Goodhearted Green had bought for the various sums of thirteen pounds, twelve, and eleven.

Not that Lucy got the money ; but Mr. Hazey's cheque was drawn in her favour ; and she had to indorse it ere Mr. Romford and Goodheart could manipulate the money, according to the peculiar arrangement that existed between them.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE DISASTER.—THE "LORD HILL" HOTEL AND
POSTING-HOUSE.



THE Earl and Countess of Caperington were staying at their seat, Caperington Castle, enjoying the old-womanly sport of *battueing*, when the wondrous Leotard arrived. Here they were, entertaining a semi-distinguished party—not quite good enough to advertise, perhaps, but still very sounding in titles. Two or three dowagers, who lived half the year at their own expense and half at other people's; some distinguished foreigners, some equally distinguished Englishmen. The guests being chiefly of the adhesive order, were about tired of each other; consequently anything that created conversation was extremely acceptable. Leotard now furnished some.

He was greatly praised and admired by all—all excepting Mr. Bustler, who called himself his lordship's stud-groom, though the stud only consisted of a few ponies. Bustler had not been properly propitiated in the £—s.—d. transaction, and thought Leotard had been punctured for a spavin, though nothing of the sort had ever been done. Indeed, if Leotard's mental qualifications had been as good as his bodily ones, he would have been a very nice horse, and well worth a hundred pounds. But, like many bipeds, he could better bear adversity than prosperity, and as soon as ever he got his condition up a little, back came all his bad qualities. He then would not do anything he didn't like, and if coerced, resented it. He then either kicked the party over his head, or, in the language of

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the low dealer, "saluted the general"—that is to say, reared up on end.

Now Leotard, with a perversity that had always distinguished him, went perfectly well on the first days of trial : the Countess's way being apparently his, and the Countess's pace also. When, however, he became better acquainted with the roads and the country, he began to exercise a judgment of his own ; and one day, when the Countess wanted to canter across the grass sidings of the Rosendale road, to meet the overladen market coaches, Leotard insisted upon taking her to Tewkesbury. Not that he had any acquaintance at Tewkesbury—indeed, we daresay if she had pulled him up for Tooksbury, as she called it, he would have insisted upon going to Rosendale. It was just a spirit of contradiction—a sort of equine awkwardness that nobody could account for. The Countess, however, had a spirit too ; and, moreover, had no idea of a horse, for which her noble husband had given such a liberal price, presuming to exercise a will of his own. So she just administered the whip—one, two, three ; but before she got four the horse was up straight on end, and the Countess was down over his tail. It was just Mrs. Rowley Rounding over again.

Then off went the horse, full tilt at first, but not finding himself pursued, he relaxed into a snorting, tail-distended, head-diverging trot, as though he were surveying the landscape—much after the manner of the Benicia Boy. General chasers made a "click" at him, as they called it ; but Leotard evaded them all, and entered Caperington Park just as the noble Earl and his party opened fire on the rabbits on Fourburrow Hill. Then there was such a commotion, and sending off, and running heel, to track the offender back to the site of the dissolution of partnership. The Countess, however, had tucked up her habit, and one of the before-mentioned overladen market coaches coming up, she hailed it, and made three on the box, sitting between the coachman and a puffy butcher from Bassetlaw. Thus she met the affrighted party, easing their minds but not her own, for she was very angry with the horse, and wanted to give him a good whipping. When,



"THE COUNTESS WAS DOWN."

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however, she saw him stand and deliver Mr. Bustler like a shot, she thought she had better do it by deputy; still more so when she saw a helper share her own fate. The horse was then unanimously pronounced to be vicious.

At this juncture there appeared upon the scene our rosy-gilled, silvery-haired friend, now no longer Sir Roger Ferguson, but the old original Goodhearted Green, of Brown Street, Bagnigge Wells Road. Goodheart was so overcome with grief at the Countess's misfortunes, that he could scarcely find utterance for his sorrow. "Oh dear, he was distressed! he was 'urt! he didn't know the time when he had been so put about! Hadn't slept a wink for two nights for thinkin' on't. The Countess ought never to get on to such a quadruped again. He knew the 'oss—wicked, mistetched animal, that had been turned out of half the stables in London. People that sold such 'osses ought to be indicted for conspiracies." And after a good deal of similar palaverment, he concluded by saying he thought he knew a man who would give fourteen or fifteen pound for him; which Goodheart affirmed was more than he was worth. And though it certainly was a miserably dejected figure to take for a two-hundred-guinea horse, yet, when he won't do anything for his keep, what is the use of him? So they just let him go, hoping to get something back from Coper and Hazey. Coper, of course, could not be found; and though Hazey liked Countesses, he loved money more, and could not bear to part with his beloved gains. It was hard to lose the profit of his labour, especially when he believed the objection to the horse was founded partly on caprice, and partly on incompetence. The boy Bill assured him that nothing could go better than the horse did the morning he tried him at Tarring Neville; and certainly Mrs. Somerville rode him with the greatest ease and composure. If the Countess had given more for him than she liked, that was no reason for dissolving the bargain. Many people expected more than they got, and those who knew the least about horses always expected the most. Hazey had had many such, but none of them had ever got a halfpenny out of him. He didn't sell hands, only horses.

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The horse, we need scarcely say, was soon back into Beldon Hall, undergoing the treatment and discipline necessary for keeping him in something like subjection; and when Mr. Hazey heard that Mrs. Somerville was riding him as usual, he gained confidence in his cause, and asserted boldly that the horse was as quiet as a lamb, and had doubtless been ridden injudiciously, or spoiled by mismanagement.

The Countess felt piqued at this announcement, conceiving that it conveyed an imputation on her horsemanship; for though she was not in reality a good rider, yet she thought she was, and perhaps was more sensitive on the point than if she had really been one. The Earl, too, backed her opinion, seeing that she sat well on her horse and looked the equestrian; and the party generally favoured the view that the horse was vicious. Hazey, however, held out the other way; and for once believing his own story, stated that the fact was capable of proof, for the horse might be seen with the Larkspur Hounds almost every day in the week; Mr. Hazey, perhaps, not thinking that any one would be at the trouble of making the long journey for the purpose of seeing. Here, however, he was mistaken, for railways have annihilated distance; and having got a locality to work upon, the Countess talked and fretted, and fretted and talked, till she worked herself up into a resolution to go and see. If anybody would go with her, she would really go and see. She would like uncommonly to go and see. She thought it would [be very good fun to go and see. And a lady in that mood not being likely to remain unescorted, especially when she paid the expenses first, Major Elite, and then Mrs. Mountravers—both staying guests—volunteered their services to accompany her into Doubleimupshire. And as none of them had ever been there before, or had the slightest idea how to get to it, the expedition furnished abundant food for conversation; first to find out what part of Doubleimupshire Mr. Romford hunted; secondly, how it was to be got at, and, thirdly, where the meets of the hounds were.

To this end maps, and books, and "Bell's Lifes," and "Bradshaws" were consulted, and calculations made for train

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meeting, and crossing, and catching. Then came the sorting and packing and arranging for the journey, the Countess taking as much luggage as in former times would have served a traveller to India, all, of course, directed—so that they who run might read—“To the Right Honourable the Countess of Caperington.” Then there was such a to-do about her ladyship’s man, and her ladyship’s maid, and her ladyship’s this, and her ladyship’s that.

At length they got started as well from the castle as from the neighbouring station of Lilleyfield, and, after numerous halts, and stops, and changes, with the usual variations of speed peculiar to different trains and systems of railway, they found themselves, towards sunset, contemplating the tall spire of Dirlingford Church from a dumpy little station about a mile from the town. Railways which make some places ruin others, and Dirlingford had suffered the latter fate. The railway seemed to have sucked all the life out of it—taken it all up to Pickering Nook. So few passengers stopped there that the solitary omnibus did not meet every train, and now that the driver had got a haul in the graceful person of the Countess and her attendants, he seemed appalled at the quantity of luggage. Didn’t know how he should ever get it up. Independent Jimmy would have had it on during the time this one was looking at it. At last, with the aid of the porter, he got it accomplished, and the party being now seated—“Where to?” was the question. “Head inn!” was the answer.

“That’ll be the ‘Lord ’ill,’ then,” said he, and, hurrying round to his horses, he mounted his box and drove down to the town.

The “Lord Hill” hotel and posting-house, at Dirlingford, was a good sample of the old-fashioned wayside inn, now fast disappearing before the march of modern civilisation. It was a great gaunt four-storeyed small-windowed red brick house, standing right in the middle of the High Street, its front door reached by an iron-railed flight of steep stone steps. On the right of the door was a caged bell that had announced the coming of many a carriage; on the left the name of the landlord,

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John Scorer, with the words "neat wines, neat post-chaises" below. Above the door was the sign of the house, the "Lord Hill," a faded warrior in full uniform, powdered and pig-tailed according to the prevailing fashion of the day.

At one time it kept twelve pair of post-horses, besides a few that worked on the farm, and seven long coaches changed horses at it twice a day. Great were the gains from the unfortunate victims whom necessity compelled to take the road in those days. They were treated much like cattle at a market, pushed and squeezed and fed anyhow. It was for the great magnates of the road that the landlord's attention and civility were reserved. Then, when the bow-legged "next boy out" descried the coming carriage, he gave the caged door-bell such a ringing as caused a similar commotion in the house to that which attended the coming of the Countess of Caperington to Mrs. Slyboots' the milliner's, at Worryworth. The "Lord Hill" was convulsed.

And the mention of her ladyship reminds us that we have got her and her party in the Dirlingford omnibus, from which we had better extract them as soon as we can. One disadvantage of the now universal use of public conveyances undoubtedly is, that consequence does not get properly attended to. When the maid dresses so much finer than the mistress, it is difficult at first sight to distinguish between them—to say which is which. The Countess, however, was not one of that sort, and always dressed as became her exalted station, and the 'bus had scarcely stopped at the "Lord Hill" hotel and posting-house door ere it was bruited throughout that a great lady had come. Then down went Scorer's pipe on the inner bar table. Mrs. Scorer adjusted her antiquated frilled cap in the looking-glass, the old bed-gowned chamber-maid, Rebecca, slid downstairs, holding on by the banisters, and Timothy, the bald-headed, short-breeched antediluvian waiter, with something between a napkin and a duster in his hand, waddled out of the commercial room to join the commotion in the passage. Great was the bobbing and bowing and curtsying and your ladyshipping, great the gesticulation

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to induce them to get forward out of the way of the now-coming boxes, and ascend the narrow staircase to the gloomy regions above. Of course there wasn't a fire in any of the rooms, "but they would light one directly," Scorer said. And to this end Rebecca began to strike a light with a flint and steel in the "Trafalgar," declaring she could get one sooner that way than with a lucifer-match.

The "Lord Hill" was a close, frowsy old house, from which every breath of air seemed to be excluded by heavily-dressed curtains before the never-opened windows. The sitting-rooms were large and low, their lowness being further aggravated by most oppressively heavy mouldings on the ceilings. It was enough to give one the nightmare to think of such ceilings. As to those grand old temples of suffocation, the large four-post beds in the small rooms, the large boot-jack, the diminutive towel, and insoluble soap, they are yet to be found in most countries, and need not be described. We also pass by as well the order for, as the incidents of, the mutton-chop dinner—the offer of everything with the reduction to nothing; the battered copper-betraying side-dishes, the green hock, and dull needle-case-shaped champagne-glasses, with the strong loathsome cheese that followed the dry unpalatable tart. Let us suppose the evening spent; the long wax lights replaced by short ones, and our tired travellers off to bed, to sleep, to dream, or perchance be bit by bugs.

Those who have watched the progress of public conveyances, seen how the fastidiousness of former times has gradually disappeared before the lights of common sense and utility, can have little doubt that another great change is coming over the nation in the matter of domestic economy. The universality of travel; the extreme difficulty of getting servants at home—the hopelessness of managing them when got; all tend to show that clubs, which answered so well for gentlemen, are about to be extended to families, in the shape of the magnificent hotels now rising up all around, where, if people do pay for accommodation, they at all events get an equivalent for their money.

CHAPTER LX.

SPITE OF ALL AND STAND AGAINST ALL.



R. FACEY ROMFORD, like most good sportsmen, eschewed show meets; he also avoided making them at inns or public-houses. He had no fancy for being waylaid by skirmishers on the look-out in the highways and byways, to bring in all they could catch to be stuffed with a second breakfast before he had half digested the first. Still less to have his hounds pressed upon or ridden over by pot-valiant horsemen fresh from the joys of the tap or the table. Hence, some of his meets were rather ambiguous, especially to strangers, of which, however, there were few came into the country. A bridge, a milestone, or guide-post were all favourite places of his; but among the anonymous ones was a place called Spite of All, whose locality was difficult to fix. The name was not very promising, suggestive more of the tenacity of the squatter than the politeness of the country. And Spite of All was one of those troublesome encroachments against which the Lord Lonnergans of former times used to be content to issue their edicts without seeing them enforced. Spite of All had therefore become a freehold, and had to be respected, notwithstanding it stood on the domains of a Duke. But it so happened that Spite of All was not the only place of this description in Doubleimupshire. On the north-east side was its duplicate, called Stand against All, and people in the hurry of the moment were very apt to mistake one for the other. There was an obstinate resistance recorded

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against each, with a triumphal retention by both the parties in possession.

Well, the meets of Mr. Romford's hounds for the week were Monday, Raw Marsh; Wednesday, Thorncross Hill; Friday, Spite of All; Saturday, the tenth milestone on the Larkspur Road. Friday is generally considered an unlucky day; at all events a day that people do not generally choose for their pleasure expeditions; and it was unlucky on this occasion; for if the meet had been transposed, Friday the tenth milestone, and Saturday Spite of All, Mrs. Somerville would have been at Spite of All, and not at the road meet, while, in consequence of the confusion of manner and ideas, the Countess would have been at the road meet, and not at Spite of All, so they would never have met, for Mr. Hazey picked up another customer for the Leotard horse before the Monday.

But we anticipate.

One might as well ask a hairdresser or a haberdasher about the meets of the hounds as the waiter at an inn, but attached to the "Lord Hill" hotel was an antediluvian post-boy—one Benjamin Bucktrout, the last of the twelve who had driven from that door—whose geographical knowledge was said to be great. Bucktrout was an illustration of the truth of the old saying, that nobody ever saw a dead postboy, for if he had been anything else, he would have been dead long since. As it was there was little left of him but his chin and his hands, save what people might conjecture was in his jacket and boots. And the Countess of Caperington, who was accustomed to have everything arranged for her, told her maid Priscilla, when she herself retired to her great tabernacle of a bed, to find out how long it would take to go to Spite of All, and to call her accordingly. Then Bucktrout being appealed to, declared he knew the place quite well, and that it would take him an hour and twenty minutes to go there, part of the road being, he said, in a very indictable state of repair. And so he was ordered to time himself to be there at 10.30 to a minute, the Countess never allowing any one to be unpunctual but herself.

Accordingly next morning, Bucktrout having made himself

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as great a swell as he could,—scrumpy red jacket with blue glass buttons and tarnished silver lace at the black cotton-velvet collar and cuffs ; questionable breeches, with seedy boots, turned round a very passable queen's-coloured barouche with a gorgeous crown on the panel, drawn by a pair of high-boned, hard-featured white horses, the usual accompaniments of wedding festivities. Then the footman and Priscilla the maid, and the landlord and the landlady, having made as much fuss and preparation as they could, what with cloaks and cushions and furs and footwarmers, stood waiting the descent with a graduated sliding scale of spectators tapering away from the doorsteps down to the kennel. And, after a sufficient pause, old Timothy announced that the "Countess was coming!" the "Countess was coming!" Then all was eyes right and attention: Bucktrout, subsiding in his saddle, contemplated his horses' ears, while John Thomas stood bolt upright, holding the carriage door in his right hand. Priscilla occupied the other side of the steps to assist the crinolines in their ascent into the carriage, while the rest of the party ranged themselves in a semicircular *tableau*, after the manner of actors when the curtain is going to fall. The great people get in, the voluminous clothes are arranged, and the door closed quickly to prevent an egression.

"Right!" cries the gold-lace-hatted footman, as he jumps into the rumble, and away they bowled up the grass-grown High Street of Dirlingford, drawing many fair faces to the windows, and eliciting many ejaculations of "Who can those be?" "Who can those be?" "Bless us, what swells!"

Bucktrout did his best to keep the old nags up to their collars as they pattered over the uneven cobble-stones of the street, not knowing how a judicious display might tend to take the wind out of the sails of the opposition spicey greys at the "Golden Fleece" inn; but as they got upon the level surface of the Silverdale Road the old gentleman gradually relaxed in his exertions until a very gentle rise in his saddle alone denoted that the horses were not walking—indeed, at one time they looked as if they were all going to sleep together.

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Bucktrout was a ruminating old boy, and between cogitations as to whether he should drag down Higson Hill, or risk it, where he was likely to get his dinner, and what the Countess would be likely to give him over his mileage for driving, he directed his attention to the question of getting to his destination. "Stand agin All," mutteerd he—"Stand agin All; that'll be by Fitzwarren, and round the old tower to Happyfield Green and Ringland."

"Stand agin All—Stand agin All. Sure it was Stand agin All that they said," continued he, rubbing his nose on the back of his old parchment-like eye as a sudden thought came across his mind, whether it was Stand agin All, or Spite of All that they said. "Sure it was Stand agin All, they said," repeated he, giving the led horse a refresher with his knotty whip, as if to get him to coincide in that view. Still Buckey had his doubts about it, and as he jipped and jogged he began, like a prudent general, to think how he should manage matters in case he was wrong. "Spite of All and Stand agin All were very much alike," he said: "One as bad as the other a'most; couldn't make much difference which they went to. Most likely it was one of those things they call pic-nics, where folks make themselves as uncomfortable as they can, and call it pleasure. Sure, for his part, he would like to sit at a table with a clean cloth before him, and a knife and fork to eat with instead of his fingers." Then he gave his own horse a dig with his spur, by way of preserving the balance of pace.

Meanwhile the Countess and party, having timed themselves as well as they could by their watches, began looking about for the usual indications of the chase—foot-people in a hurry, grooms with their masters' horses, sedate gentlemen jogging on with their own. The Countess expected to see the naughty Leotard pop up at every point. But no; neither pedestrian, nor equestrian, not even the man with the colt in the breaking-reins appears. Major Elite suggested that perhaps Mr. Romford's half-past ten meant eleven. Many masters of hounds, he said, were very unpunctual.

The road, which for some time had been twisty and turny,

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to say nothing of what the Countess called "coggley," presently became worse, being formed of nothing but soft field stones ground down to excellent housemaid's sand, and after a slow tug through its laborious depths, the old screws came to a standstill just opposite where another road branched off at right angles, and the veteran Bucktrout, turning half round in his saddle and pointing to a wretched mud cottage with a thatched roof built into a bank, announced with a grin and a touch of his greasy old hat, "Please 'um this be Stand agin All."

"Stand against all!" exclaimed the Countess. "That's not the name of the place we want to be at! *Spite* of All, not Stand against All!"

"Well, mum, it's all the same, mum," replied Bucktrout, now satisfied of his error, but determined to brazen it out. "Some folks call it *Spite* of All, you see, my leddy, and others call it Stand agin All, you see, my leddy. It's the place you mean, the place they had the great 'size trial on aboot, before Lord Chief Justice Best and a special jury, which doubtless you've heard tell on." Bucktrout thinking it immaterial whether the Countess saw the cause of one assize trial or another. Both places had been in Court.

But here we may observe that *Spite* of All would have felt rather humiliated by the comparison, for while Stand against All let its smoke out of the four-square-paned window or the rickety door, *Spite* of All had a fine fire-brick chimney rising boldly out of a substantial grey roof; two fairish windows, and a door that a moderate-sized man could get under without stooping. Moreover, *Spite* of All was in a good country with fine wild foxes, and Facey Romford knew where to find them.

Be that as it may, however, here were our friends at Stand against All, and though Bucktrout's assertion had an air of plausibility about it, yet there were no hounds to back the decision.

"Well, it's very odd," said the Countess, looking about with concern.

"Must have mistaken the day," observed Major Elite.

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"No," rejoined her ladyship firmly; "I'm certain I'm right. Friday, Spite of All; Saturday, the tenth milestone on the Larkspur Road."

"Or the hour," suggested Mrs. Mountravers, looking at her watch, which, however, afforded little assistance, for it was standing at half-past two.

Bucktrout now stood up in his stirrups, contemplating the country like a whipper-in waiting to view a fox away. Nothing to be seen. Stand against All seemed to have it all to itself.

"Knock and ask," now said the Countess, addressing herself to the footman as though she were at the door of a Belgravian mansion.

"Please, my lady, who shall I inquire for?" demanded he, touching his fine cockaded hat, as, having descended from his perch, he now stood at the carriage door.

"Ask if the hounds are coming here to-day," replied her ladyship.

"Yes, my lady," said the footman, trotting off, taking care of his shoes as he made for the rickety, weather-beaten door of the miserable hut.

Rat, tat, tat, tat, tat, he went at the frail wooden fabric, as though he were going to demolish it.

"Who's there?" roared a stentorian voice, that a westerly wind wafted in full force to the carriage.

"Please do the hounds meet here to-day?" asked the footman in his mild company accents.

"No, you ass!" roared the poacher, for it was none other than Giles Snarem, the notorious leader of the night gang, whose second sleep he had thus disturbed.

"Come away!" cried the Countess—"come away!" satisfied there was a mistake somewhere.

The order was satisfactory to old Bucktrout, who feared if the inquiry was prosecuted any further it would transpire that the hounds were at Spite of All, whereas he had driven the party to Stand against All, though he was certain about the action being tried before Lord Chief Justice Best, because one of the high sheriff's javelin men lodged at his house, and told

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him all about it—indeed, he believed the javelin man had been of great assistance to the judge in trying the case. At the word “home” from the footman, he therefore caught his old screws short by the head, and turning the carriage round, what with flagellating one horse and spurring the other, he managed to make them plough through the heavy sand at a much better pace than they came. A respectful distance being thus established between Stand against All and our travellers, he presently relaxed into his old jog-trot pace, and having stopped to refresh himself and horses at the “Barleymow” wayside inn, he trotted into town with as much dash and vigour as he could raise. Those terrible greys at the “Fleece” were always haunting his vision, urging him and his horses beyond the decaying powers of either.

Arrived at the “Lord Hill” hotel and posting-house, the first thing he did after setting down was to run and look at “Bell’s Life” in the bar, and finding Mr. Romford’s hounds advertised for Spite of All, he told the landlord he had better book the journey to Spite of All, and then there would be no mistake in the matter.

“All right,” said he; “all right,” scrambling out crab fashion. “Spite of All, and Stand agin All ’ill be all the same thing—same thing—place they had the ’size trial on about afore Lord Chief Justice Best and a special jury.”

So that day’s journey went for nothing.

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CHAPTER LXI.

THE TENTH MILESTONE ON THE LARKSPUR ROAD.



ROILED in her first effort to get a sight of the redoubtable Leotard, the Countess of Caperington returned with vigour to the charge, sending, immediately on her return from Stand against All, into the commercial room of the "Lord Hill" hotel and posting-house for the old well-thumbed map of the county, and searching with avidity for the next meet of the hounds. Fortunately for Bucktrout, neither Spite of All nor Stand against All had obtained their present notoriety when the map was published, consequently they were not on it to contradict his assertion that they were one and the same place; and her ladyship having placed her pretty forefinger on the extensive stain denoting her then locality at Dirlingford, she proceeded to make a very scientific cast to the east in search of the diminutive town of Larkspur, formerly the residence of the Doubleimupshire hounds.

"Here it is!" at length cried she, looking up, "here it is! right to the north-east of this place," and getting a cedar-wood match out of the lighter stand, she proceeded to measure the scale in the corner of the map, and then the distance from the before-mentioned greasy mark on the side.

"Oh, quite within distance," said she, "quite within distance; not above twelve miles from here at most, by Burbury and Cracknel."

So saying, her ladyship dismissed the map, and ordered the dinner for that day, and the carriage for the next, with one and

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the same breath. And now leaving the reader to imagine a repetition of the former evening's performance, we will pass on to the following morning, and suppose the Countess and party again taking the field in the "Lord Hill" carriage in all the glories of consequence and dress.

Bucktrout had increased his magnificence by adding a pair of tarnished red and white rosettes to his antediluvian horses' heads, and sat cockily in his brass cantrelled saddle, thinking how he was taking the shine out of Peter of the "Golden Fleece," and his greys. Then after the fuss and preparation, gaping and staring and starring of the former occasion, the Countess and her friends came downstairs, and with due importance got themselves seated and adjusted in the carriage.

"Right!" again was the cry, and the low part of the High Street was this time enlivened with the sound of carriage wheels. If people in London ran to the window to look at every vehicle that passed, what a time they would have of it.

Bucktrout rode with much more confidence than he did in going to Spite of All, for he knew his way, and moreover was certain that he was going right. So he rose cockily in his saddle, now admiring his left-leg boot, now looking into the flowing rosettes at his horses' heads, now whipping and spurring the old nags into activity. If he wasn't cutting a dash he didn't know who was. Jip, jip, jip, he went as if they were a pair of five-year-olds instead of being nearer five-and-twenty. The road was good—turnpike all the way: none of the sand-stone quagmires, with great boulder stones turning up like flitches of bacon every few yards, that impeded their progress the day before.

They had not gone many miles ere the first indication of the chase appeared. This was a tight-buttoned blue-coated groom riding a well-conditioned brown horse, between whose sleek coat and the rider's tops there seemed to be a species of honourable rivalry as to which should be the darkest. The horse had it perhaps, but only by a shade or two. Formerly grooms couldn't get their boots white enough: now they can't get them dark enough. Such is the mutation of fashion.

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"All right to-day," said the Countess, eyeing the unmistakable symptom. Bucktrout then passed him at a half cantering trot.

The plot presently thickened. At the Burbury side bar two grooms were paying their own and their hack-riding masters' tolls, and a little further on a knot of miscellaneous horsemen were regaling themselves at the door of the "Good Intent" inn with early purl and other delicacies. Some people can drink at any time. Bucktrout spurts past them as if he despised such performances. The country was evidently getting alive.

Ah! there's a red coat! Only a seedy one, to be sure, as the first red coat on the road generally is, but still a red coat, thus openly proclaiming the nature of the coming entertainment. It is little Tommy Squirt, the Union Doctor, who is deceiving himself, as Independent Jimmy would say, that he is passing for a great man, though in reality he is only offering himself for a figure of fun. A badly turned-out man in red is always a deplorable object; doubly so when the horse and the coat are equally bad, and all the appointments show that the colour is expected to do everything. On he jogs his badly-clipped mouse-colour very gingerly, having both corns and a curb to take care of. And now the brute trips in a grip just as the carriage is passing, causing an outburst of laughter from the party.

Then the turn of the road reveals another red coat—a red coat on a grey—a rat-tailed grey this time. It is our old friend the Chairman of the Half-Guinea Hat Company, who has become very assiduous in his attendance on the Larkspur hounds of late. He has got himself up with extra care, with his all-round-the-chin beard combed carefully over his blue tie, like samples of yellow and white worsted on a stall.

"What an ugly man!" exclaimed the Countess in passing, quite loud enough for Bonus to hear.

"Isn't he!" assented Mrs. Mountravers, in the same tone.

"Wonder he doesn't dye his beard all the same colour," observed Major Elite, whose turn it now was to stare.

But we are now ascending the slightly rising ground of Cracknel Green—a rise so gentle that it was not until the

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establishment of railways that it was found out not to be level. Bucktrout's horses, however, who have wonderfully fine shoulders for detecting the collar, feel it at once, and gradually relax into a walk. Half-way up stands the ninth milestone, calm and serene as milestones always are, but causing the ladies to start and adjust their bonnets, and Major Elite to button his gloves and feel his collar. They are presently overtaken by a large party of horsemen, some in black, some in red, some in green, who stare and wonder who old Bucktrout has aboard to-day. Though they all admire the Countess, they think the Major might be very happy with either.

And now the indubitable level being obtained, Bucktrout has no excuse for further nursing, and at the word "trot!" from the Countess he gathers the old horses together, and with the aid of the spur, the whip, and the voice, is presently at the

" Delightful scene !

When all around is gay, men, horses, dogs ;
And in each smiling countenance appears
Fresh blooming health and universal joy."

Our foxy-faced master has just turned into a large pasture on the right of the road, the hounds looking blooming and well. Daniel—the Right Honourable the Hurl of Scamperdale's Daniel—sober and solemn ; and little Chowey, the man with the philanthropic mouth, contracting and dilating his proboscis as though he were considering whom he should kiss. Romford rides the redoubtable Placid Joe, Swig the water-objecting Brick, and Chowey the wriggling Oliver Twist. They now take up a position well into the field, and give the hounds ample space to roll and be criticised.

Then there is the field, large, parti-coloured and gay, as fields generally are when the meets of the hounds are by a turnpike side, and carriages and horsemen can commingle. There are two or three gigs, and two or three phaetons, some containing gentlemen, who on peeling will prove horsemen, while others will follow in their vehicles as far as they can, and then go away.

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"Turn in here!" cried the Countess; "turn in here!" as the hesitating Bucktrout pulled up at the field-gate, and looked round with a grin.

"Yes, my lady," said he, now gathering all his energies to steer through the gate without a collision against either post. He just managed to do it.

"Who have we here?" said Romford to Mr. Joseph Large, who still patronised the pack at great personal inconvenience.

"Don't know," replied Large; adding, "it's the 'Lord Hill' chaise."

"So I see," said Romford, who had long booked the old horses for the boiler.

Then, as the carriage approached and drew up before the pack, Facey, seeing the ladies were pretty, raised his hat, an example that was immediately followed by Chowey and Swig with their caps. Chowey half thought the Countess was an old acquaintance, but for once he couldn't hit it off.

Then, as the hats and caps subsided, there was fresh inquiry as to who the strangers were, and a sending of Todd on the sly to ask Tomkins, and a similar expedition by Large to Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent., who now came up on the rat-tailed grey. None of them, of course, could tell. But here comes some one who can, viz., our fair friend, Mrs. Somerville, who, entering the field by a gap at the opposite corner, confronts the carriage as she advances mounted on the wondrous Leotard.

Lucy wondered who the strangers were—then she thought she had seen that face before—very like Lady Scattercash's—couldn't be Lady Scattercash—yes it was Lady Scattercash.

"How do you do, Lady Scattercash?" said she, riding up to the carriage-door and tendering her hand as she spoke. But the Countess, who had had the advantage of a quiet carriage-seat for the survey, had realised Lucy before Lucy did her, and her displeasure at seeing the horse going so quietly was not at all diminished by the familiarity of *that person* calling her Lady Scattercash, when she was in fact the Countess of Caperington. So she neglected the proffered hand and preserved a stolid scornful stare.



Most pernicious women!

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"I think you don't know me," said Lucy, timidly, withdrawing her hand as she spoke.

"Yes, I do," replied the Countess, haughtily. "You are Mrs. Sponge — Lucy Glitters that was — most pernicious woman!" added she, with an upward curl of her lip.

If the Countess had stabbed her to the heart she could not have inflicted a more deadly wound, for there were horsemen all around, every one of whom, Lucy felt sure, would hear what was said. The words perfectly rang in her ears—"You are Mrs. Sponge — Lucy Glitters that was — most pernicious woman!" She was indeed Mrs. Sponge—Lucy Glitters that was; but she felt that it was not for an old comrade like Lady Scattercash to upbraid her. She would not have done so by the Countess. And, turning her horse short round, poor Lucy burst into a flood of tears.

Notwithstanding the unwonted sight of a lady in tears in the hunting-field, we believe if it had not been for that long-eared Chairman of the Half-Guinea-Hat Company, Lucy's misfortune might have escaped observation. He, however, being downwind, with his ears well cocked as usual for a catch, heard the ominous "*You are Mrs. Sponge!*" coupled with the denunciation "*most pernicious woman!*" and immediately put that and that together for a story. Not that he went bellowing about the country exclaiming, "I say, this is not Mrs. Somerville, but Mrs. Sponge, the wife of our friend Soapey Sponge," but he innuendoes it, which was just the same thing. The story flew like lightning, and in a very few days was all over Doubleimupshire. But a great deal may be done in a few days, and ere the bubble finally burst a great deal was done in this case. But the *dénouement* of all this spirited conduct deserves a separate chapter.

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CHAPTER LXII.

THE FINISH.



IT was an eventful morning to other parties besides our friend Mrs. Somerville. When she got back to Beldon Hall she found the fair auburn-haired lady had played young Joseph Large off so successfully against Mr. Lovetin Lonnergan as to make the latter consent to a clandestine marriage, of course to be kept profoundly secret until it pleased father to die. And Mrs. Somerville, feeling the pressure of circumstances and the precarious nature of her own position, at once set about furthering the arrangement, not by ordering those voluminous mountains of clothes and dresses that generally mark the coming change, but by quietly procuring a marriage licence and an obliging clergyman to use it.

Then, to make surety doubly sure, and completely baffle old Lonnergan should any reports get into circulation, Mrs. Somerville suggested that Miss Howard should be married in a feigned name, and hit upon that of Shannon. "Elizabeth Shannon, say," as if quite accidentally; and Lovetin thought the idea rather a pull in his favour if anything, being greatly goaded by the persecuting importunities of that disgusting Joseph Large, who, he felt sure, would marry her at any price.

The Registrar, holding the document firmly in one hand while he presented the palm of the other, said in an unbroken breath, "Two pound twelve and sixpence, and I hope it will make you both very happy," his happiness evidently consisting in getting the two pound twelve and sixpence. And Lovetin

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paid the money (which "Old Rent-should-never-rise wouldn't have done) without asking for discount. Lord Lonnergan would certainly have had the sixpence, if not the two and sixpence off.

It would not interest the reader to follow the worthies through the consequences of their mutual disappointments; suffice it to say, that there was presently an uproar, though not of Mrs. Lubbins's order, both at Dalberry Lees and Beldon Hall.

Our sprightly friend Betsey Shannon had the best of it, for here was real wealth and an easily-managed husband.

Of course the match was not kept secret—as what match ever is?—but its announcement was not attended by any unpleasant consequences. The fact was, that though father was not obliging enough to die, yet his faculties failed just at the very time, the first indication of which was the conviction that Betsey Shannon, now Mrs. Lovetin Lonnergan, was a great City heiress; and Mrs. Lonnergan, always trusting her great man implicitly, received her daughter-in-law at Flush House with the greatest cordiality. There Mrs. Lovetin was most comfortably located, everything going on most harmoniously, thus contradicting the assertion that there never yet was a house built large enough to hold two families.

The old lord used to sit in his easy-chair contemplating Betsey's beautiful figure and complexion, muttering aloud, "Ah, lucky dog, Lovetin, lucky dog; always told you to stick up for the money. Beauty and breeding are nothing compared to blunt." Then he would burst out with the old favourite aphorism, "When has a man got enough money, Lovetin? When he has got a little more than what he has. Ah, lucky dog, lucky dog! Be as rich as Rothschild—rich as Rothschild, my boy."

But we are occupying ourselves with a minor hero to the neglect of our great master, Mr. Romford.

When matters burst up at Beldon Hall, Cassandra was indignant exceedingly, and we need not say that there was terrible disappointment at Dalberry Lees, crimination and recrimination.

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"If he didn't say himself he was the owner of Abbeyfield Park, everybody did for him, and he never contradicted it. Turbot-sitting-upon-its-tail on a cap of dignity, forsooth! What business had he to seal his letters with a turbot-sitting-upon-its-tail on a cap of dignity? Downright imposition. Gaining credit under false pretences. Ought to be transported." So said Mrs. Hazey.

But Facey, as the reader has seen, was a man of energy and determination. He was yet young, vigorous, and ungrizzled—not at all trammelled with nice feelings or delicacy—and having got in the bulk of his season's subscription for the hounds, he sold the balance to our friend Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent. for fifteen shillings in the pound, and without indulging in any further blandishment about founding the hospital for decayed sportsmen, pocketed the money, and got his hounds and horses away a few hours before poor Lord Lovetin's bailiff threatened to seize for the quarter's rent. Indeed, his lordship had his misgivings almost as soon as he let his place, particularly with regard to not restricting Mr. Romford from the use of the cut pile carpet that Mrs. Emmerson and he differed about.

"Fox-hunters," his lordship said, "might scrape their feet and wipe the thick of the mud off their boots at the door, but there was a deal that stuck to the upper parts of the legs that he knew dropped off here and there as it liked at its leisure." All this would tread into the carpet and furniture generally, and he questioned that Mrs. Mustard would look very deep for hidden dirt.

Nor were his anxieties diminished by the non-receipt of the quarter's rent when due for Beldon Hall, which, having been let by himself, he expected the pleasure of manipulating without the mulcting process as it passed through Mr. Lonnergan's hands. Indeed, he had promised himself the pleasure of buying a new black Lyons silk waistcoat with the percentage so saved, an article of raiment that he was greatly in want of. In fact, he had marked two or three down in the Palais Royal that he thought he could compass; but then, like a prudent viscount, he did not like spending the money before he got it. Now he

MR. FACEY ROMFORD'S HOUNDS.

wished he might not be thrown naked and houseless on the world when he had long been looking forward to comparative ease and comfort in his old age.

But his anxieties were not thoroughly aroused until meeting little Jack Lounger in the Rue de la Paix, reading a letter from England, with an account of the splendours of the Beldon Hall ball, which not being insured, it instantly occurred to his lordship that Romford would infallibly be burning the place down. "Burn it down to a certainty!" exclaimed he, thinking he saw it all in a blaze, the flames bursting out simultaneously from every window, just as they did at Camden House—"Burn it down to a certainty! Statuary, marble, Sèvres china, clocks, cabinets, Apollo, Daphne, and all. That sort of work wouldn't do; he would be reduced to beggary in no time. Great as would be the expense, and ill as he could afford it, he really thought he must go over to England and see how matters stood." He mistrusted Lonnergan, who he thought would be sure to side with the tenant. And accordingly, after due consideration, his lordship went with a return ticket, available for one month, by rail to Boulogne, and then by one of the General Steam Navigation Company's ships to London Bridge Wharf, thence on by rail again to Firfield Station, altogether to the damage of two pound five. Serious work for the silk waistcoat!

It was evening when his lordship arrived, and Independent Jimmy was at the back of the station, as usual, catching the passengers as they came out, just as a butcher catches sheep coming out of a fold.

"Noo then! where are ye for?" demanded Jimmy, getting hold of his lordship.

"Beldon Hall," replied the Viscount.

"Then *get in!*" exclaimed Jimmy, jerking his capped head towards the open omnibus door. "Noo then! where are ye for?" inquired he of another. And so he went on till the stream of humanity ceased to flow.

He then climbed up on to his box and cut off; shortly after which the process of setting down, "Noo then, this is

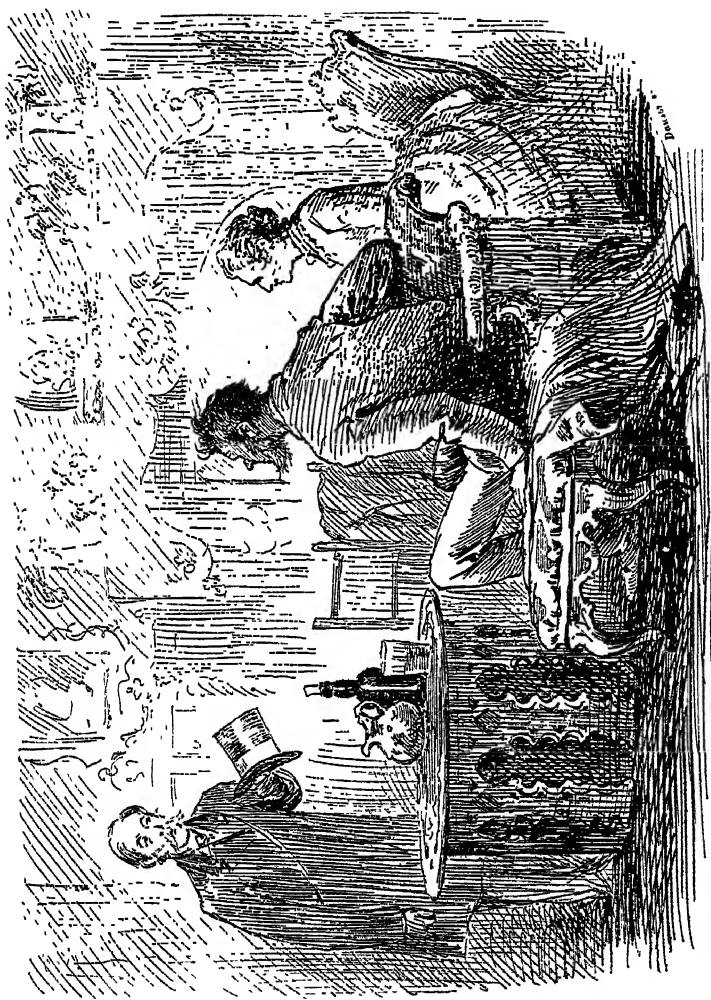
MR. FACEY ROMFORD'S HOUNDS.

so-and-so, get oot!" commenced. "Noo then, this be Beldon! —get oot!" at length said he to his lordship. And his lordship got out accordingly, slipping his bag into the lodge to be sent for as he passed. He then slipped up to the house by the back way.

Being a lord, and feeling the advantage thereof; moreover, remembering Frank Romford's peaceable demeanour at school, and recollecting also that he himself was on a visit of inspection; his lordship thought he had better assume a little more intimacy than really existed, and affect to come upon his tenant in the way of a friendly, agreeable surprise. So, without ringing, he opened the door and let himself into the house. The spacious hall was dark and gloomy—not even a solitary tallow candle illuminating its monotony: but if a man can find his way anywhere without a light, it is in his own house; and feeling rather comforted than otherwise at the absence of an illumination, his lordship passed through the echoing hall, and entered the vestibule beyond. Here a light under the bottom of a door indicated residence; and, after a momentary pause, he gave a gentle tap.

"*Come in!*" roared Romford, thinking it was the strong, persevering man who cleaned horses. "*Come in!*" repeated he still louder, the first summons not being obeyed.

His lordship then did as desired, and disclosed a *tableau* of considerable strength and variety. Before a bright, partly coal and partly wood fire, on a small round table of the finest buhl and red tortoise-shell, stood Facey's old friend the gin-bottle, flanked with a half-emptied tumbler and a well-stocked bag of tobacco; our master was stretched at full length on a richly carved and gilt sofa, covered in old Gobelin tapestry, the elbows and back in green Genoa velvet, smoking his pipe at his ease. On the left of the table, shaded from the fire by a clothes-horse containing sundry articles of male attire, sat Mrs. Somerville, in a reclining chair covered with rich purple and amber satin damask, darning a pair of Mr. Romford's old stockings. Having a good front view, each started with astonishment at the sight of the other.



"I'M LORD LOVETIN."

MR. FACEY ROMFORD'S HOUNDS.

However much boys may change as they grow up into men, there will generally be some distinguishing feature by which they can be recognised; but under no possible process could the little dark-beady black-eyed Romford of his lordship's early days have grown up into the great shaggy Herculean monster that now arose from his lair before him.

His lordship started, for he thought to give his old school-fellow an agreeable surprise; and Romford started, for he was not accustomed to intruders, and didn't want to be troubled. They then stood staring at one another like Spanish pointers, each wondering who the other was.

Lord Lovetin at length broke silence. "Beg pardon," said he, "but I thought it was Mr. Romford."

"Romford it is," said Facey, yawning, and stretching out his great arms as if to show the intruder what he had to contend with. (He half thought it was somebody come after old Fog's £50.)

"But not the Romford I was at school with," observed his lordship, eyeing him intently.

"Don't know who you are, to begin with," replied Facey; "but moy name's Romford," observed he; "*that o'll swear to.*"

"I'm Lord Lovetin," replied his lordship, mildly.

If his lordship had put a pistol to our master's head he could not have given him a greater shock; and forthwith all his acts of omission and commission rushed to his mind with terrible velocity: the trifle of rent, the conversion of the coach-houses, the spurious sister, the turbot-on-its-tail seal.

We need not follow our friends through the *dénouement* that ensued on the discovery by his lordship of the mistake he had made in jumping to the conclusion that there was only one Mr. Romford in the world, nor relate how Mr. Facey Romford not only insisted upon sitting rent free during the time he had been at Beldon Hall, but also upon receiving a handsome bonus for going out, which his lordship, albeit almost heartbroken at the sacrifice, thought it better to do than submit to any further devastation and deterioration of property. Oh, what a shock it was to him! Knocked ten years out of his life, he said.

MR. FACEY ROMFORD'S HOUNDS.

The more his lordship saw, the less he liked what had been going on.

The place was indeed in shocking confusion: everything converted into what it was not intended for. Betsey's old brass-eyed Balmorals stuffed into the richly-carved Indian cabinet; a pound of sugar and a nip of tea placed under the shade of the figured and flowered Dresden timepiece, now left without any protection; a statuary marble figure of Psyche crowned with Facey's tenpenny wide-awake; and Mrs. Somerville's dirty goloshes tucked under the arm of a companion figure of Cupid. A majolica cup, with crest and coronet, was filled with shot; and in a Sèvres tray, with turquoise-and-gold border, reposed a battered old powder-flask.

And here let us say that we take shame unto ourselves for not as yet having introduced the noble Viscount personally to the reader. Take then a short but faithful sketch, executed in the field in the detective style. Say five-and-forty years of age, five feet ten inches high, sallow complexion, long visage, dark hair, thin on the top [like the passionate gentleman's in "Punch"], dark hazel eyes, arched eyebrows, narrow feet and a very narrow mind, short whiskers and long spiral moustache, stoutish build with a military air; dressed in a complete "Ditto" suit of brown, with a French wallet slung over his shoulder, and a peaky French travelling-cap held in his hand; added to this, a peculiarity when speaking of shrugging up his shoulders continually.

The news soon spread that his lordship had cast up—dropped in "quite promiscuous," as the saying is, and was very ill-pleased with all he had found.

The Dirties had come in for their share of the censure, and promulgated what passed pretty freely. And when a story once gets admission into a house, it soon finds its way into the drawing-room.

Still Facey had his friends in the hunting-field, men who said he was the right Romford—the right man in the right place, as far as they were concerned. He could kill a fox with any one, and had as good a pack of hounds as ever came into a country.

MR. FACEY ROMFORD'S HOUNDS.

If he wasn't a man of much blandishment, as Independent Jimmy said, still he could go across country like a comet ; and nothing pleases people so much as a dashing, fearless rider.

Facey, moreover, who, as our readers will perhaps have seen, had assurance enough for anything, went on in his usual routine way, hunting his country with great fairness and impartiality, contending—with some degree of plausibility—that nobody had anything to do with anything but his hounds. They might hunt with him or not, just as they liked, he said ; but he would be master of his own house (as he continued to call Beldon Hall), so he just advertised his meets as before.

And indeed, but for a certain interesting circumstance, we don't know but he would have continued to hunt the country up to the present time, and that circumstance we shall now proceed to relate. Amid all the snubbing and cold-shouldering that ensued, one house remained firm and faithful to our Facey, and that was the house of our distinguished friend Willy Watkins. Nobody there would hear anything against Mr. Romford. They didn't "want to hear anything against Mr. Romford." "They wouldn't hear anything against Mr. Romford. They begged that nobody would trouble themselves to tell them anything against Mr. Romford. The world was made up of spite and ill-nature, and people generally spoke from an interested motive." [This latter observation was levelled at Mrs. Hazey.] "Lord Lovetin was a notorious screw, and doubtless wanted to cheat Mr. Romford. Mr. Romford was quite right in resisting him." And poor Willy was sent out hunting twice a week, in order to keep up appearances ; this, too, when the now diminished fields made the risk extra hazardous in the way of fencing, few caring to break them for him.

And considering how the men were divided in opinion as to whether Mr. Facey was the right Romford or not, there is nothing extraordinary in a lady who knew so little about hunting as to suppose that a bag-fox, or a day with Mr. Stotfold's stag-hounds, would be acceptable to our master, mistaking the controversy about the keenness for the real question as to the

MR. FACEY ROMFORD'S HOUNDS.

ownership of Abbeyfield Park, and as there was a doubt about the matter, giving the benefit of the doubt to the party she was interested in, viz., to our Mr. Romford. As the men couldn't marry Mr. Facey, they didn't care whether he was the owner of Abbeyfield Park or not; but it made all the difference to Mrs. Watkins. This was, when she made her mistake, a very natural one. He was the right Romford to the gentlemen, but not the ladies.

So Facey continued to visit at Dalberry Lees with his flute, taking an occasional spin for a perch in the Trent as he passed; and nothing could be more cordial or encouraging than the family.

The reader will be surprised at the promotion of the match under such circumstances, but the cause is easily explained. The fact was, that the accounts from Australia had latterly been very discouraging. The worthy papa had been much outwitted of late, and had made some very improvident speculations, as well with Willy's money as his own.

Nor were the Honourable, and the lady *who was very nearly an honourable*, the only ones who sought the secret services of the Church at this memorable epoch. Strange as it may seem, our most sagacious friend Facey led to the hymeneal altar our lofty-minded friend Cassandra Cleopatra, with the full consent of her august parents. Nay, it was difficult to say whether the Watkinses or Facey were most anxious to hurry on the match, the Watkinses considering that Cassandra would be perfectly safe with her ample dower out of Abbeyfield Park, while friend Facey thought it would be a very good thing to have Dalberry Lees to fall back upon when matters should burst up at Beldon Hall.

Our fair readers will perhaps think that there is not sufficient inducement here shown for our lisping friend foregoing that greatest triumph of female life, the excitement and preparation of a grand wedding. Men always wish them over as quietly as possible; ladies can never make fuss and display enough. Well, but there was a reason for it, notwithstanding, as we have before intimated. The fact was, that the worthy old convict whom we

MR. FACEY ROMFORD'S HOUNDS.

left in the colony to manage his own and his son-in-law's affairs, while the latter and his wife, or lady, as her husband called her, came over to England to see if there was anybody good enough for the daughter, had had the misfortune to make some very bad speculations, and had lost the greater part of that wealth which Willy had lost the greater part of his hair in obtaining.

It was not, therefore, desirable to undergo the manipulation of the lawyers on Cassandra's account, and they could therefore hardly ask Mr. Romford to submit to it on theirs. They had no doubt at all that Mr. Romford was very rich, and that it would do uncommonly well. And Mr. Romford, not being inclined to write for the title-deeds of Abbeyfield Park, or indeed to have any unnecessary hiatus in his hunting, agreed that it was far the best to manage matters quietly, and then go to London and have a flare-up in the spring. People get far more for their money there, he said, and he knew everybody in London, —Smith, and Brown, and Bates, and all.

The Romford stud sold uncommonly well, as it naturally would where its good qualities only were known. Placid Joe passed into the hands of Mr. Hazey for £90, and having borne him triumphantly through the thick of his own hounds, quickly passed out again at a loss of £60. Hard day for poor Hazey. He thought to stick him into Sir Theophilus Thickset at a considerable premium.

Mr. Joseph Large bought the fine weight-carrying bay called "Everlasting," but which declined against the hills, and was very well suited, the horse being always as ready to stop as Large was himself. So they agreed capitally together. Large gave £80 for him, teapot-handles being rather on the rise at the time of the sale.

"Ten-and-a-half-per-Cent." bought "Perfection," the nutmeg grey, with a partiality for scrubbing its rider's legs up against carriage-wheels; and the brute having subsequently made rubbing posts of the postman's gig, Linseed the doctor's fly, and Marrow the butcher's cart, his owner was at length constrained to come to the conclusion that he had better send "Perfection" to Aldridge's, where he was knocked down for a

MR. FACEY ROMFORD'S HOUNDS.

£10 note—his character being perfectly well known to the frequenters of the Repository.

When Facey and the Watkinses came to the knowledge of the *do* they had practised on each other some sharp passages were exchanged, and a family war was on the point of commencing, when the name of Willy Watkins made its appearance in the *Gazette*. Facey was not the man, he said, to kick a foe when he was down; so it was agreed that all matters of difference between them should be buried in oblivion, and that Romford and wife should start forthwith to the Antipodes, and look after the old convict and the wreck of Willy's property. This resolution was forthwith acted upon: and, strange to say, almost the first person our hero met in the streets of Melbourne, just opposite Bright, Brothers & Co.'s store, at the corner of Flinder's Lane and Bond Street, was our estimable friend Mr. Sponge, the runaway husband of the all-accomplished Mrs. Somerville, who has played so conspicuous a part in our story. Soapey—looking as brisk and spruce as a man who has lit on his legs and can hold up his head before anybody—very different to the Mr. Sponge who bolted by the backway from the cigar-shop in Jermyn Street; and though that “sivin-pun-ten” was still standing against him, it did not prevent Mr. Sponge hailing his creditor with unfeigned cordiality.

And indeed he had good cause for looking brisk, for he too had been to the diggings, and, not far from where friend Willy Watkins feathered his nest, had pitched upon some uncommonly good nuggets, which he had now come to Melbourne to sell. People who will pass each other on the grand street of life—the Parks or Pall Mall, for instance—will fraternise uncommonly on a Swiss mountain, or at the Antipodes. So it was with our distinguished heroes.

Of course Facey knew nothing about Lucy, and, upon the principle that where ignorance is bliss 'twere folly to be wise, Soapey was not extra-inquisitive about her. To the credit of Betsey Shannon, who had gained such an ascendancy over her sapient husband as a spirited young woman like her ought to

MR. FACEY ROMFORD'S HOUNDS.

acquire, Mrs. Somerville had a capital billet at Flush House, where she was treated with the greatest respect by the old buff-vested lord and his lady. They thought Lucy was second only to Betsey in beauty and breeding. But dependence is irksome, and Lucy presently longed for a crust of bread and a crib of her own.

The attainment of these *desiderata* shortly afterwards presented itself in the following letter from Betsey Lonnergan, who had gone up to town for a few days, leaving Lucy in possession of Flush Hall :—

“ MAWLEY'S HOTEL,
“ *Wenesday.*

“ DEAR LUCY,—

“ I write to say we shant come home till after the turn of the week, as Lovetin and me am going for a couple of days to Fokestone to see a cousen of his.

“ You mustnt be dull, but keep your spirits up like a little brick as you are.

“ Now for some news, which will make your back hair stand out like a Chinese man's pigtail. I were setting in our carrige at Carling's the sighgur shop's door in Regent Street, whiles Lovey had gone in to get some weeds, when who should I clap my eyes on but Bellville as 'used to was' with us you know afore he went to Orstralia—(is that right?—well, if isn't, you know what it means).

“ Bellville went to lead in tragedy, you know, up at the diggins', and a pretty tidy pike he has made on it. He was dressed quite like a swell—blue frock coat, with brade and frogs and a poodle collar, and his trowseys were tite, *à la* Charley Mathews, only they had brade down 'em too. Mustash, of course, and all that. Well, he stares at me and me at him, till he sees me smile, and then he offs with his tile and makes up to the carrige-door. After a short scene of surprise, he asks, 'Commy foe?'—Quite correct, eh?

“ ‘Of course,’ says I, with a frown; and then we both laughed, as you may fancy.

“ Well, B. told me what ‘tremendous success’ he had had—



“AT THE ANTIPODES!”

MR. FACEY ROMFORD'S HOUNDS.

thought him Macready in disguise—gave him half share of the house, and a clear ‘Ben’* every month—and he has made mopusses enuff to come back quite indiapendent.

“‘What’s that to me?’ says you, ‘or to Betsey Shannon’ now she’s the bride of another?

“This is what it is. In course of conversashun he asked after you, and why you and Soapey had parted. I told him the truth—how Soapey had bolted and left you to shift for yourself. ‘Then,’ says B., ‘I can give her the cue to find him again, if she wishes it. He’s doing furst rate at Melburn; and if she’s short of rowdy to pay her passige out, Im ready, for “Awl Lang Sign,” to lend it her.’

“There, my dear, that’s something for you to think about till me and Lovey come home again—and here he is, ready to take me to the Canterbury, where I have teased him to go this evening.

“Bless you, dear, and please see that fires are kep in our bedroom and my bodore. Good-by.

“Your affectionate friend,

“BETSEY LONNERGAN.”

Lucy did not long deliberate over the contents of her friend’s letter before she decided to share the success of her Sponge. She resolved to discard the assumed name of Somerville, and set out for the Antipodes in search of him; so, following in the wake of the Romfords, she presently found him, and both Facey and Soapey gave her a most cordial greeting.

The voyage out had agreed with her, and she was looking, if possible, handsomer than ever. Soapey took to her without hesitation, on the sensible principle of letting “bygones be bygones.” And Facey, who was a capital manager, so long as he hadn’t the old lady to contend with, had, with the aid of twins, got the lisper into such subjection and good order that Beldon Hall was all ignored—never mentioned.

Indeed, Mr. Romford didn’t see why, save the elegance of

* *I.e.*, half the receipts, and a benefit free of charge.

MR. FACEY ROMFORD'S HOUNDS.

the name, Lucy shouldn't have called herself Mrs. Sponge instead of Mrs. Somerville.

And we are happy to say that old Granby Fitzgerald's defalcations were not so utterly ruinous as were at first expected. There is something saved out of the fire for Willy, while Facey, with his natural aptitude for taking care of himself, has secured a trifle also ; which, with what he took out with him, makes him up quite a purse. The last account heard of Soapey and him was that they were going to set up a bank in Collins Street East, under the firm of

“ROMFORD AND SPONGE.”

Good luck attend their exertions say we. We expect to hear of their setting up a pack of hounds together next.

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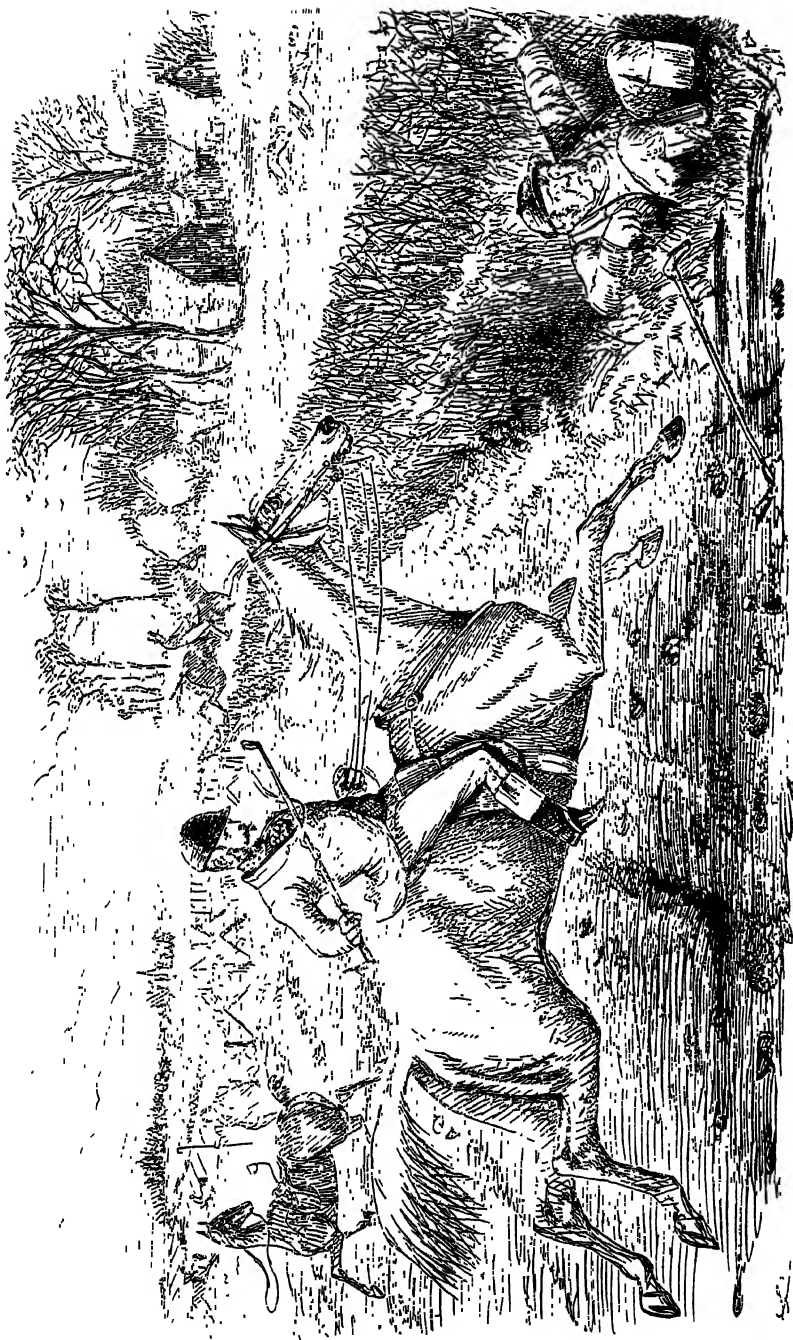
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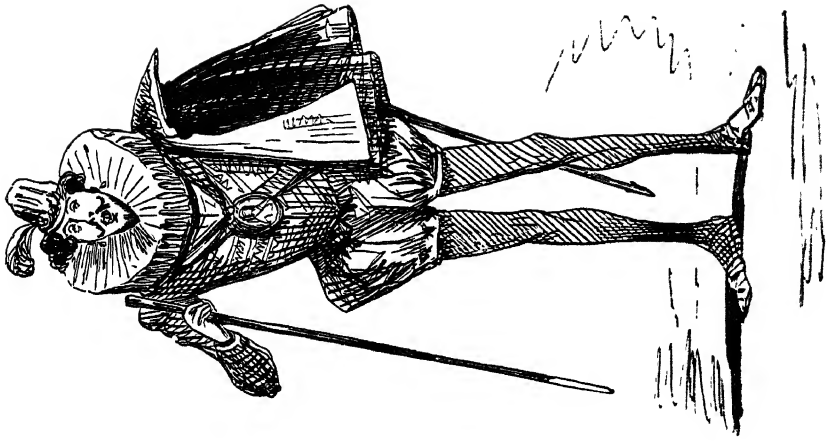


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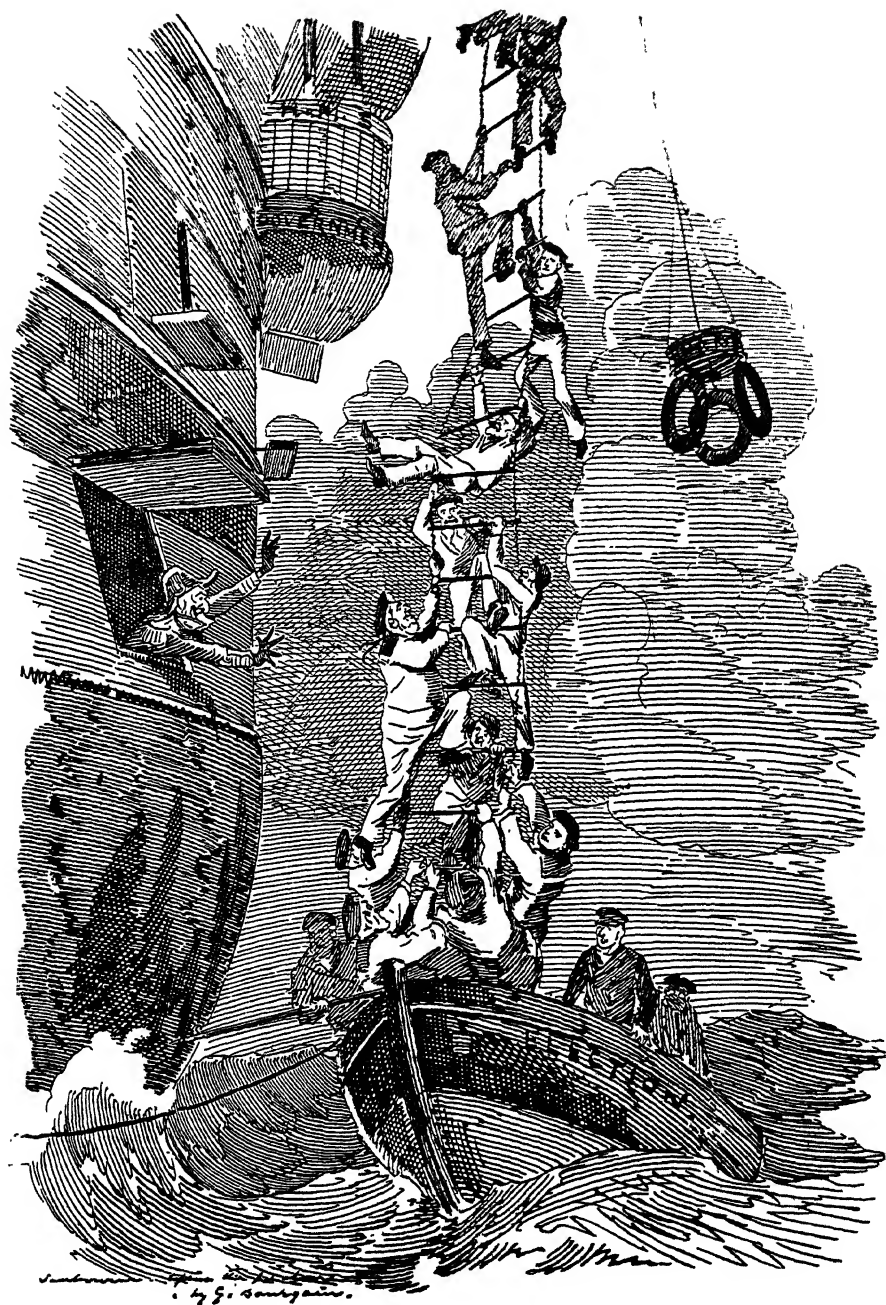
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Then take thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh ;

But, in the cutting it, if thou dost shed

One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods

Are, by the laws of Venice, confiscate

Unto the state of Venice.

Gra. O upright judge !—Mark, Jew ! — O learned judge !

Shy. Is that the law ?

Por. Thyself shall see the act :

For, as thou urgest justice, be assured

Thou shalt have justice, more than thou desirest.

Gra. O learned judge ! — Mark, Jew ; — a learned judge !

Shy. I take this offer then,—pay the bond thrice,

And let the Christian go.

Bass. Here is the money.

Por. Soft.

The Jew shall have all justice ; — soft ; — no haste ; —

He shall have nothing but the penalty.

Gra. O Jew ! an upright judge, a learned judge !

Por. Therefore, prepare thee to cut off the flesh.

Shed thou no blood ; nor cut thou less, nor more, But just a pound of flesh : if thou tak'st more,

Or less, than a just pound,—be it but so much

As makes it light, or heavy, in the substance,

Or the division of the twentieth part

Of one poor scruple,—nay, if the scale do turn

But in the estimation of a hair,—

Thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate.

Gra. A second Daniel, a Daniel, Jew !

Now, infidel, I have thee on the hip,

Por. Why doth the Jew pause ? take thy forfeit.

Shy. Give me my principal, and let me go.

Bass. I have it ready for thee ; here it is.

Por. He hath refused it in the open court ;

He shall have merely justice, and his bond.

Gra. A Daniel, still say I ; a second Daniel ! —

I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word.

Shy. Shall I not have barely my principal ?

Por. Thou shalt have nothing but the forfeit.

To be so taken at thy peril, Jew.

Shy. Why, then the devil give him good of it !

I'll stay no longer question.

Por.

The law hath yet another hold on you.

It is enacted in the laws of Venice,—

If it be proved against an alien,

That by direct or indirect attempts

He seek the life of any citizen,

The party 'gainst the which he doth contrive

Shall seize one half his goods ; the other half

Comes to the privy coffer of the state ;

And the offender's life lies in the mercy

Of the duke only, 'gainst all other voice.

In which predicament, I say, thou stand'st ;

For it appears by manifest proceeding,

That, indirectly, and directly too,

Thou hast contrived against the very life

Of the defendant ; and thou hast incur'd

The danger formerly by me rehearsed.

Down, therefore, and beg mercy of the duke.

Gra. Beg that thou mayst have leave to hang

thyself !

And yet, thy wealth being forfeit to the state,

Thou hast not left the value of a cord ;

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GLOSSARY.

Excrement—bedded hair, like life in excrements.

The word *excrement* was a general term for anything growing out of the body, as the hair or nails.

Eyases, nestings. An *eyas* is a young unfledged hawk, just taken from the nest.

Fantasy, imagination, fancy.

Fardels, cumbersome or inconvenient burdens.

Fay, faith. Possibly from the French *foi*.

For and a shrouding sheet, and also a shrouding sheet.

Fordoes, undoes, destroys, ruins.

Friending, friendliness, friendship, favour.

Fust, to become mouldy or fussy, to smell ill.

Gentry, courtesy, good breeding, politeness.

Gib, a tom-cat.

Gules, red. A term in heraldry.

Handsaw—know a hawk from a handsaw. The word "handsaw" is a corruption of *heronshaw*, a provincial term for a heron.

Habenon, possibly intended for *hebane*.

Hent—know thou a more horrid hent, i.e. be reserved for a more dreadful occasion.

Hic et ubique, here and everywhere.

Hoodman-blind, the game of blind-man's buff.

Hugger-nugger, clandestinely, by stealth.

Impitious, unchecked, without pity, merciless.

Imponed, laid down as a wager.

In few, in a few words, in brief.

John-a-dreams, a sleepy, muddle-headed fellow.

Jump just, exactly, in the nick of time. A familiar term with this signification in Shakespeare's days.

Keep—where they keep, i.e. what places they frequent.

Kibbe, a chilblain.

Lets, hinders, prevents, impedes.

Liberal shepherds, free-spoken, licentious shepherds. An obsolete meaning of the word *liberal*.

GLOSSARY.

Limed soul, i.e. caught as with bird-lime.

List, a boundary or limit.

Loggati, an old game, which consisted in fixing a stake in the ground and pitching small pieces of wood at it.

Long live the King! The watchword of the night.

Mussard, the head, the skull.

Merrily—passes it merrily, i.e. absolutely.

Mitching mallecho. Skulking mischief.

Mitch, moist, shedding tears.

Mobled, muffled or wrapped up, veiled.

Moist star, the moon.

Mutines, mutineers.

Napkin—take my napkin, i.e. my handkerchief.

Native to, connected by nature with.

Obsequious, serious, as at funeral obsequies.

Occurrences, occurrences, current incidents or events.

Paddock, a toad. A diminutive of the Anglo-Saxon *pad*, a toad.

Painted word, i.e. disguised word.

Patocke, a peacock.

Parle, a parley, a conference with an opponent.

Perry, an exclamation. A contraction from the French *par Dieu!*

Polacks, Poles, natives of Poland.

Porpentine, porcupine. An obsolete form of the word.

Provincial roses on my rased shoe, i.e. rosettes in the shape of Provence or damask roses, on shoes, which according to the fashion of the period were slashed or streaked in patterns.

Quiddits, quiddities, subtleties in law or in common talk.

Quilllets, nice points or quibbles.

Quoted, observed, noted, scanned.

Rack, a mass of clouds.

Recorders. A recorder was a kind of flag-volet.

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